

# Studies in the Scriptures

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# January

## **THE RIGHT BEGINNING**

How much depends upon a right beginning. If the foundation be faulty, the superstructure is insecure; if the babe be undernourished the child will be unhealthy; if the child grows up uneducated, the man is handicapped for life. Doubly so does this hold good in spiritual matters. If the preacher ignores the law and presents only the Gospel, his “converts” will be as worthless as wheat sown upon ground which was neither plowed nor harrowed. If the babe in Christ be erroneously indoctrinated, he is disqualified from fighting the good fight of faith. If the local church fails to maintain a Scriptural discipline, and instead spends its energies in home and foreign “missions,” then disastrous will be the outcome. In like manner, if we enter upon a new year without beginning it properly, then we cannot expect to enjoy spiritual prosperity therein.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1). Thus opens the sacred Scriptures and since they are of divine authorship what other frontispiece could they possibly have! This is the very essence of their inspiration, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation [human origination]. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pe 1:20-21). Not to human skill nor to human goodness is the Bible to be attributed, but rather to the wisdom and superintendence of the Spirit is it to be ascribed. So, too, of the contents of the Scriptures, “In the beginning God”—He is the Alpha as well as the Omega of their subject matter. From Genesis to Revelation, He has the precedence and the pre eminence. The precepts, the promises, the predictions of Holy Writ are alike prefaced with a “Thus saith the LORD.”

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1) is the explanation of salvation. Alas that this is so faintly recognized and so feebly insisted upon today. True, that in most circles reputed as orthodox it is still allowed that the planning and providing of salvation is of the Lord, but when it comes to the actual reception and enjoyment thereof, proud man determines to place the crown of honour upon his own head, by insisting that that which made him to differ from the unsaved was his willingness to accept Christ. But from whence did such willingness originate? Certainly not from mere nature, for the heart of every unregenerate person is stubbornly steeled against its Maker. God must take away the heart of stone and impart a heart of flesh before there will be any yielding to the gracious influences of His blessed Spirit. The fact is that we love Him because He first loved us. Had He never chosen us to be His sons, we should never have chosen Him to be our God.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1). is the essence of all genuine piety. The fear of God and the love of God are the springs from which all true yielding of ourselves unto Him proceeds, and where there is not that, real spirituality is absent. Hence we read of the Corinthian saints that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5)—for the Lord wants no man’s money till He

first possesses his heart. Until we have surrendered ourselves to the authority of God our profession is worthless and our religion is vain. Hence it is that the hortatory section of the first epistle of the New Testament opens with, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). It is here we must begin and it is to here we must constantly return.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1) was the keynote of the life of Jesus Christ, and throughout the whole of His course everything was in perfect keeping therewith. He could say, “I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly” (Psa 22:10). Herein we perceive His uniqueness, for none other could make such a claim. From the very first breath that He drew, His whole being was completely yielded to God. Hence it was that as a boy of twelve we hear Him exclaiming, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luk 2:49). “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance” (Psa 16:5), was His unqualified testimony and therefore could He affirm, “I have set the LORD always before me” (Psa 16:8). Even in the midst of His crucifixion agony He cried, “My God, my God,” and into His hands He trustfully committed His spirit, assured that His soul should not be left in Hades nor His body suffered to see corruption.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1). Is not this the word we particularly need to take unto ourselves and lay to heart as we enter upon a new year? Should we not begin by solemnly renewing our covenant with God and consecrate ourselves afresh to Him? His claims upon us are paramount—gratitude for His countless mercies calls for nothing less. Review the past, my reader. Can you discover any cause for regret whenever God was given the first place in your life? Ah, is it not because other things were allowed to displace Him from the throne of your heart that you now find most occasion for sorrow and shame? Then should we not seek to profit from these disastrous lapses and prevent their recurrence? And how can we do so but by contritely confessing our sinful failures and by begging Him to come in and sup with us afresh.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen 1:1). Is not this our desire and resolve as we enter upon a new cycle of time? Should not I, and you, my reader, make this our motto for 1940—that we prayerfully determine to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways; to embark upon no undertaking (great or small); to enter into no fresh relationship; to essay no task—without first seeking God’s help and blessing? Let, “In the beginning God,” characterize each fresh day by our turning to Him from whom all our help comes. In perplexity, in sickness, in sorrow, let us turn to God first, and not to human counselors, doctors, or loved ones. Yes, and when we have sinned, let us promptly and penitently seek the face of Him who delights in mercy. And should this be the year when death sends us a solemn summons to depart hence, let us submissively place ourselves in His hands and then we shall “fear no evil” (Psa 23:4), as we pass through the valley of shadows, and in a far grander sense will it then be true, “In the beginning [of our new experience] GOD,” (Gen 1:1) for “absent from the body...present with the Lord” (2Co 5:8).

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *13. The Law and Retaliation—Matthew 5:38-42*

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat 5:39). In order to properly understand and rightly apply this injunction, due regard must be paid to its context, and the whole interpreted in harmony with the general Analogy of Faith, otherwise we are in imminent danger of making Scripture to contradict itself. As we sought to show last month, Christ was not here repealing an important Mosaic statute and substituting in its place a milder and more merciful rule for His followers to observe, but was (as in the preceding sections of His sermon) refuting an error of the scribes and reprehending the evil practice of the Pharisees. They had given a promiscuous application to a judicial regulation for the use of magistrates, a regulation which placed strict bounds upon the punishment to be meted out unto those guilty of deeds of maiming.

The statute pertaining to magistrates only had been given a general application, so that the people were allowed to take the law into their own hands—each individual being free to privately avenge his wrongs—which not only condoned but encouraged the spirit of malice and revenge. It was in view of this wicked perversion of the divine law that our Saviour said, “Resist not evil” (Ma 5:39). More literally it is, “Resist not the evil one,” that is, the evil individual who has injured you. Resist not:—think not of taking the law into your own hands, requiting the adversary as he has done to you. Cherish not against him the spirit of revenge, but be actuated by nobler principles and more spiritual considerations. Such is plainly the general purport of this precept. Its particular implications must now be considered.

Even Mr. Frederick W. Grant (1834-1902, a leader among the “Plymouth Brethren”) stated that, “The righteousness of the law, of course, remains righteousness, but it does not require of any that they exact for personal wrongs. There is no supposition of the abrogation of law or of its penalties. The government of the world is not in question, but the path of disciples in it. Where they are bound by the law, they are bound, and have no privileges. They, are bound, too, to sustain it in its general working, as ordained of God for good. Within these limits there is still abundant room for such practice as is here enjoined. We may still turn the left cheek to him that smites the right, or let the man that sues us have the cloak as well as the coat, which he has fraudulently gained—for that is clearly within our rights. If the cause were that of another, we should have no right of this kind, nor to aid men generally in escape from justice or in slighting it. The Lord could never lay down a general rule that His people should allow lawlessness or identify themselves with indifference to the rights of others” (The Numerical Bible).

“Resist not evil” (Mat 5:39). That which Christ here forbade was not the resisting of evil by a lawful defense, but by way of private revenge. Public reparation is when the magistrate, according to the justice and mercy of the divine law, sentences an evil person that has injured his fellow. Private revenge is when those who are not magistrates take matters into their own hands and retaliate against those who have wronged them. The former is clearly permitted, for an apostle declares the magistrate is, “the minister of God,” for executing judgment upon evil doers. The same epistle as expressly forbids retaliation, “Recompense to no man evil for evil” (Rom 12:17).

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil” (Mat 5:39). There are many who err in supposing that such a precept as this is peculiar to the New Testament. A comparison of the two Testaments will show that identically the same rule of duty is obtained in both economies. “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head” (Pro 25:21-22); “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head” (Rom 12:20). Rightly did one of the older writers say, when commenting upon this passage in Proverbs 25,

“The law of love is not expounded more spiritually in any single precept either by Christ or His apostles than this exhortation.” It’s obvious meaning is seize the moment of distress to show kindness to him that hates you.

Living in a sinful world, we must expect to meet with injustices and unprovoked injuries. How, then, are we to conduct ourselves under them? The answer is, first, God forbids us, both in the law and in the Gospel, to recompense evil for evil. The taking of private revenge, either inwardly or outwardly, is expressly prohibited. “Say not thou [no, not even in thine heart] I will recompense evil” (Pro 20:22). We must not so much as allow the thought that some day I shall have an opportunity to get my own back. I am not even to hope it, still less resolve the same. The Christian should not desire or determine anything on which he cannot in faith ask God to assist him in—and most assuredly he would have no ground whatever to expect the Lord to help him in the execution of a malicious revenge.

We may not requite evil for evil in thought, word, or deed to those who mistreat us, but rather suffer injury and refer our cause to Him who is the judge of all the earth. Because this duty goes against our natural inclinations, let us mention one or two persuasions thereto. First, it is the expressly revealed will of God for us and His commands are not grievous. Second, vengeance belongs unto the Lord, and if we take it upon ourselves to privately avenge our wrongs, then we rob Him of His right. Third, Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps, and “When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1Pe 2:23). Yea, when He was cruelly and unjustly crucified, He prayed for His persecutors. Finally, Christ has plainly warned us that if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will God forgive ours (Mat 6:15).

But now we must face the question, How far this precept, “Resist not evil” (Mat 5:39), is binding upon us—is it to be regarded absolutely? Does it recognize no limitation and make no allowance for exceptions? Is the Christian to passively endure all wrong? Here is where we must seek guidance from the Analogy of Faith, or in other words, ascertain the teaching of collateral passages. If this is done, it will be found that while our text enunciates a principle of general application, it is not a universal one. To deduce from it the doctrine of unlimited non resistance to evil is to pervert its teaching and to exalt the letter above the spirit—just as to insist that the plucking out of a right eye which offends or the cutting off of an offending right hand (Mat 5:29-30) must be understood, and obeyed literally would be to entirely miss our Lord’s meaning in those verses.

First, the teaching of Christ elsewhere manifestly forbids us to understand, “Resist not evil” (Mat 5:39), in an unqualified and universal sense. He gave explicit directions to His disciples concerning their duty toward those who wronged them, “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican” (Mat 18:15-17). Now that is very definite resistance to evil. It challenges the wrong done, examines the offense, and punishes the wrongdoer. There are more ways of resistance to evil than the employment of physical force.

Second, the idea of an unqualified non resistance to evil is contrary to the example of Christ. He resisted evil, attacked wrong-doers, and when smitten did not turn the other cheek. When He went up to Jerusalem and found His Father’s house turned into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves, He made a scourge of small cords and cast out of the temple both sheep and oxen. He

scattered the money of the desecraters and overthrew their tables (Joh 2:13-15). On another occasion He drove them out, stopped the service, and refused to let any man carry a vessel through the temple (Mar 11:15-16). That was not passive resistance, but vigorous aggression. In the judgment hall of Caiaphas, one of the officers struck the Saviour with his hand, but instead of turning the other cheek Christ challenge the smiter (Joh 18:22-23). He did not answer force with force and return blow for blow, but He exposed and rebuked the wrong.

Third, were we to offer no resistance whatever unto injuries inflicted upon us, no matter what their nature, or who their perpetrators, then we should fail in supporting and co-operating with the divine ordinance of the magistrate, and be guilty of abetting evil doers. The magistrate is God's lieutenant, His minister for vindicating the oppressed, and punishing criminals. Under certain circumstances it would be our bounden duty to seek the protection and help of the officers of the law, for they are one of God's means for preserving order in the community. If it be right for me to bring an offending brother before the church—the well being of the church requiring that he should be purged if he be rebellious, then by what principle can it be wrong for me to summon a law breaker before the magistrate, in cases where the good of the community obviously requires it?

“This command of our Lord, illustrated by the examples He brings forward, plainly does not forbid us to defend ourselves when we are in danger. To do so is one of the strongest instincts of our nature, the law of God written on our hearts. But with regard to personal injuries, when there is no hazard of life, as in the case specified, it is our duty to repress resentment and to abstain from violence. In like manner, there are cases in which it is plainly a man's duty to avail himself of the protection which the law gives to property. Justice to his creditors, to the public, to his family, may require him to defend his estate, though even this must not be done under the impulse of private revenge. But we ought to have resort to the tribunals of justice only when the cause is important and the call urgent. We are to prosecute our claims with humanity in moderation and a spirit of peace. We are to be content with reasonable satisfaction” (John Brown, 1784-1858).

When the injury received is a personal and private one, it is the Christian's duty to bear it in the spirit of meekness so long as by so doing he is not encouraging evil doers and thereby rendering them a menace to others. If I am walking on the sidewalk and a drunken motorist mounts the curb, knocks me down, and then drives off, it is plainly my duty to take the number of his car, report the offense to the police, and if required, bear witness in the court. So, too, when a wrong is done to others for whom we are responsible, resistance becomes a duty. If a man's child was in peril at the hands of some human fiend, is he to stand by and see it outraged or murdered? Did not Abraham, the friend of God, and the “father of all them that believe,” arm his servants, smite those who had taken his nephew prisoner, and free him (Gen 14:14-16)?

As we have so often pointed out in these pages, every truth of Scripture has a balancing one, and it is only by heeding the same that we are preserved from going to an unwarrantable extreme. Examples of those guilty of lopsidedness, not only in doctrine but in practice, are numerous. As there are those who put to a false use Christ's, “swear not at all” (Mat 5:34), so there are not lacking others who place an unjustifiable interpretation upon His “resist not evil” (Mat 5:39). They suppose that in this dispensation of grace it is the will of God that His children should allow the principle of grace to regulate all their actions. But certainly it is not God's will that the principle of grace should override and swallow up all other principles of action. The requirements of justice and the demands of holiness are also to be honoured by the Christian. Here, too, grace is to reign “through righteousness” (Rom 5:21) and not at the expense of it.

The same rule applies to other matters. Abstention from going to law is a sound rule of life. It is a man's wisdom, generally speaking, to keep free of litigation. The apostle condemned the Corinthians because they took their contentions before the civil courts. But is a man, is a Christian, never to resort unto law? What right have we to enjoy the social and civil privileges of a community if we ignore its obligations? Even though we may forgive an offense against our property, have we no responsibility to our neighbours? If I corner a burglar in my house, am I at liberty to turn loose upon society one who will plunder its property and imperil its security? There are times when it is the clear duty of a Christian to hand a law-breaker over to the law.

But now—exceptions do not nullify a rule, rather do they prove it. Care then must be taken lest in turning from the letter we lose the spirit of these precepts. "Resist not evil" is a plain command of Christ's and as such it is binding upon us. His follower is to be a man of peace, meekness, enduring wrong, suffering loss, accepting hardship, full of compassion and simple faith. A contentious spirit is evil—to be ever wrangling and always on the defensive is not Christian. Going to law as a rule is neither seemly nor wise. But all of that pertains to the negative side. As we shall yet see, there is a positive one, too. Good must be returned for evil, for only by good can evil be overcome. Our business is not the punishment of sinners, but the desiring and seeking after their salvation. Such was the life of our Lord and such also must be ours.

The very fact that the Lord Jesus here designated the evil-doer, "the evil one," makes it clear to us that it is the characteristic of an evil man to inflict injury upon others. The giving of this title to the wrong doer helps us understand that if we retaliate in the same wicked spirit, then we necessarily place ourselves in the same class to which he belongs. We are therefore to suffer wrong patiently. There are but two classes in the world—the good and the evil—and it is the mark of the former that they do good unto all. They who do evil evidence their likeness to the evil one, whereas the prosecution of that which is good is Godlike. If we set ourselves to do harm unto others, either by word or deed, we are in the sight of God evil men, such are usurers and extortioners, profiteers, fraudulent traders, those engaged in any enterprise which subverts morality, underminers of health, Sabbath-breakers. The Christian, then, must separate himself from all such callings and (though it entails a smaller salary) engage in that which is pleasing to God.

Although by nature, fallen men are likened unto untamed beasts and fierce animals resembling the "wild asses' colt" (Job 11:12), the lion, the leopard, the wolf, the cockatrice (Isa 11:6-8), whose nature it is to hurt and devour other creatures—when God, in His infinite mercy, is pleased to work in them a miracle of grace, bestow upon them spiritual life, and reconcile them to Himself, then they lay aside their enmity and fierceness, and live in peace with one another, so that the ancient saying is fulfilled, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isa 11:9). It is a property of Christ's kingdom that His subjects shall "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks" (Mic 4:3)—weapons of bloodshed being transmuted into instruments of usefulness. When men are truly converted, they lay aside malice and wrath, and become the doers and promoters of good. This was notably exemplified in the case of Paul, who from a fierce persecutor was transformed into a preacher of the Gospel of peace.

# THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

## *Introduction*

The office which Elijah filled supplies an important key to an understanding of the times in which he lived and the character of his mission. He was a prophet, in fact one of the most remarkable pertaining to that divine order. Now there is a real and marked difference between a servant of God and a prophet of God, for while all His prophets are servants, yet not all of His servants are prophets. Prophecy always presupposes failure and sin. God only sent forth one of His prophets in a time of marked declension and departure of the people from Himself. As this is not generally known, we propose to labour the point and furnish Scripture proofs of our assertion. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2Pe 1:19)—that expresses the general principle.

How many of our readers can recall the very first prophecy recorded in Holy Writ? Well, it is found in, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). And when was that initial prophecy given? Not while our first parents walked in obedience to and fellowship with the Lord God, but after they had sinned against Him and broken His commandments. Let this be duly noted and carefully pondered, for like the first mention of anything in the Scriptures, it is of deep moment, intimating the nature and design of all subsequent prophecy. This initial prediction, then, was not furnished by God while the original bliss of Eden obtained, but after it had been rudely shattered. It was supplied after mankind had rebelled and apostatized.

And now a harder question—How many of our readers can name the first prophet of God mentioned in the Scriptures? In order to find the answer we have to turn to the epistle of Jude, where we are told, “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds,” etc. (Jud 1:14-15). Here again we see the same principle illustrated and the same fact exemplified. Enoch the prophet lived in a day of abounding wickedness. He was contemporary with Noah, when “the earth was filled with violence,” and “all flesh had corrupted his [God’s] way upon the earth” (Gen 6:11-12). The ministry of Enoch, then, was exercised some time previous to the great flood, and he was raised up to call upon men to forsake their sins and to announce the certainty of divine judgment falling upon them should they refuse to do so.

Who are the next men referred to in Scripture as being “prophets” of God? The answer may surprise some of our readers—they are none other than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Psalm 105, we read, “He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (Psa 105:14-15). The context clearly identifies these “prophets.” “He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance” (Psa 105:8-11). And why were the patriarchs denominated “prophets”? That which has been before us in the preceding paragraphs supplies the answer, and the title here given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is to be explained on the same principle. A new and fearful evil had entered the world, and God called out the patriarchs separating them from it, so that by their lips and lives they were witnesses against it.

That evil was idolatry. So far as Scripture reveals, idols were not worshipped by men previous to the flood. But soon after the great deluge idolatry not only obtained a footing, but became general. “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods” (Jos 24:2). It is to that very period in ancient history—namely, to the days of Nimrod and onwards—that Romans 1:22-23 looks back, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.” An incidental reference, which however may be regarded as symptomatic of general conditions, is contained in, “Rachel had stolen the images that were her father’s” (Gen 31:19). It was from this awful sin of idolatry that the patriarchs were separated, to serve as “prophets”—witnesses for the true God. Thus we see once more that the bringing in of the prophet was in the face of apostasy.

Passing down the stream of human history, let us next consider the case of the chosen nation. JEHOVAH had separated the Hebrews unto Himself as His favoured people. Called out of Egypt, they were first brought into a place of isolation—the wilderness. There the tabernacle of worship and witness was erected, laws were given to Israel, and the priesthood was instituted. We read of princes, elders, and judges in the congregation, but no mention whatever is made of any order of “prophets” being appointed. Why is this? Because there was no need for them. So long as Israel walked in obedience to and fellowship with the Lord and worshipped Him according to His institutions, no “prophet” was required! This is a fact which has not received the attention it deserves. While the life of Israel remained normal, there was a place for the teacher, the Levite, and the magistrate, but no room whatever for the prophetic function.

But after Israel entered the land of Canaan and Joshua was removed from their head, what we have pointed out above no longer obtained. At a later date in Israel’s history, we do find God sending prophets unto them. Why? Because the priesthood had failed and the people had departed from God. History repeated itself—the divine mercies were abused, the divine law was flouted, the servants of God lamentably failed in the discharge of their duties. Corruption set in and there was grievous and widespread departure from the Lord. Then it was that He instituted the prophetic order in Israel. And who was it that headed the long list of Israel’s prophets? This is not an unimportant question. Acts 3:24 tells us, “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.”

Samuel, then, was the first of Israel’s prophets. He was raised up by God at a most critical juncture in their history, when true piety had sunk to a very low level and when wickedness flouted itself in high places. So fearful had things become, so far had the fear of God departed from their eyes, that the sons of the high priest himself pilfered part of the holy sacrifices, “The sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD” (1Sa 2:17). So lost were they not only to a veneration of what was sacred, but also to a sense of decency, that they “lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (1Sa 2:22). Though Eli remonstrated with them, yet “They hearkened not unto the voice of their father” (1Sa 2:25). In consequence, they were slain by divine judgment, the ark of the Lord was carried away by the Philistines, and “Ichabod” was written over the nation. Samuel, then, was raised up at a time of great declension, when, “There was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jdg 21:25).

Now all that has been before us supplies the key to an understanding of those books in the Old Testament which are more definitely known as “The Prophets.” Their messages were addressed to a degenerate and wayward people. Let us give a quotation from the first three of them. “The

vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward" (Isa 1:1-4). "Thus saith the LORD, what iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity" (Jer 2:5 and see verses 6 9). "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me" (Eze 2:3 and see verses 4 9).

The same principle holds good throughout the New Testament. The first preacher there introduced to us is John the Baptist—and what was the outstanding characteristic of his ministry? Not that of an evangelist, not that of a teacher, but rather the prophet—"He shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luk 1:17). Why so? Because God sent John unto a people who had departed from Him, to a people laden with iniquities, yet self-righteous in their sins. John was a divine protest against the rottenness of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. Though the son of a priest, John never ministered in the temple, nor was his voice heard in Jerusalem. Instead he was a voice crying in the wilderness—placed on the outside of all organized religion. He was a true prophet, calling upon the people to repent and flee from the wrath to come.

Take the ministry of Christ. In Him we see every office combined. He was Prophet, Priest and King. He was both Evangelist and Teacher, yet during His earthly ministry that which was the more prominent was the exercise of His prophetic office. Of old JEHOVAH had declared to Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deu 18:18). But let us carefully note the particular stage in His ministry when Christ began to utter prophecies as such. Most of our readers will recall there are quite a number of predictions which He made concerning His second advent, but they may not have observed that none of them was given during the early days of His service. The Sermon on the Mount. (Mat 5 to 7) contains none at all. The great prophecy of Matthew's Gospel is found near the end (Mat 24-25), after the leaders of the nation had rejected Him!

The same general principle—declension and departure from God as the dark background before which the prophet stands out—receives further illustration in the writings of the apostles. In them, some striking and most important predictions are to be met with, but mark attentively where they are located. The principal ones, those which enter into fullest detail, are usually to be found in the second epistles—2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 2. Why is this? Ah, why was a second epistle necessary? Because the first failed to accomplish its proper end. Finally, let us ask, which is the one book of the New Testament that is outstandingly prophetic in its character and contents? Why, the Revelation. And where is it to be found? At the very close of the New Testament, tracing as it does the course of Christendom's apostasy and describing the judgments of God upon the same.

Now there is one thing very noticeable about the prophets of God, no matter in what day or age they lived. We always find them walking alone with God, in separation from the religious apostasy around them. It was so with Enoch—he "walked with God" (Gen 5:24)—denoting his aloofness from the surrounding evil. It was thus with the patriarchs—"By faith he [Abraham]

sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9). So isolated was the prophet Samuel that when Saul sought unto him he had to make inquiry as to his abode (1Sa 9:11-12). As we have seen, the same thing held good of John the Baptist. He was in marked separation from the organized religion of his day. So now the servants of God are commanded to “turn away” from those “having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof” (2Ti 3:5).

Another thing which has marked the prophets of God is that they were not accredited by the religious systems of their day. They neither belonged to, nor were they endorsed by them. What was there that Enoch and the patriarchs could possibly “belong” to or “hold membership in”? How could Samuel or Elijah have any personal fellowship with the apostate Judaism of their day? How was it morally possible for John the Baptist to exercise his ministry within the precincts of the degenerate temple of Jerusalem? In consequence of their separation from the God dishonouring systems of their day, they were despised, hated, and persecuted by the religious leaders, and in the eyes of their satellites were most unpopular. The same principle obtains now. Where a denomination has repudiated (in doctrine or practice) the truth, membership in it can only be retained at the price of unfaithfulness to God, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11).

Another feature which ever characterized God’s prophets was the nature of their mission and message. This was twofold—to arouse a slumbering conscience and to comfort the hearts of God’s people in a day of ruin. The first was accomplished by a faithful application of the Word of God to existing conditions, so as to awaken the people to a sense of their responsibility and guilt. The divine law was expounded and the holy claims of God insisted upon, so that it might appear how grievously the public had departed from Him. An uncompromising call to repentance was made—a demand to forsake their sins and return unto the Lord. The second was accomplished by directing the eyes of the saints above the ruin about them and fixing their hearts upon the future glory.

Finally, it remains to be pointed out that the message of God’s prophets was never heeded by more than an insignificant and fractional remnant. The great mass even of religious professors rejected it, for it did not suit their depraved tastes. There was never any corporate recovery! Human nature then was no different from what it is now—preaching upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the certainty of judgment to come has never been acceptable. It is the false prophets who cry, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14), who were ever the popular orators. “Speak unto us smooth things” (Isa 30:10) is always the demand of the crowd, and those who refuse to yield to this clamour and instead faithfully preach the truth are dubbed “pessimists” and “killjoys.”

We return to the thought with which we opened—the particular office which Elijah sustained enables us to form an accurate judgment of the times in which his lot was cast and the specific nature of his mission. The prophet of Gilead appeared on the scene of action in one of the darkest hours in Israel’s history. And here we will stop.

# THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

## *13. Its Publication*

In our last article, we exposed the senselessness of those objections which are made against doctrinal preaching in general and the arguments which are leveled against the proclamation of predestination in particular. Then we started to point out some of the reasons why this grand truth is to be published. First, because the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation are full of it. Second, because the Gospel cannot be Scripturally preached without it. The great commission given to the public servants of Christ, duly called and equipped by Him, reads thus, “Preach the gospel” (Mar 16:15)—not parts of it, but the whole of it. The Gospel is not to be preached piecemeal, but in its entirety, so that each person in the Godhead is equally honoured. Just as far as the Gospel is mutilated, just so far as any branch of the evangelical system is suppressed, is the Gospel not preached. To begin at Calvary, or even at Bethlehem, is to begin in the middle—we must go right back to the eternal counsels of divine grace.

Rightly did a renowned Reformer put it, “Election is the golden thread that runs through the whole Christian system...It is the bond which connects and keeps it together, which, without this, is like a system of sand ever ready to fall to pieces. It is the cement which holds the fabric together. Nay, it is the very soul that animates the whole frame. It is so blended and interwoven with the entire scheme of Gospel doctrine that when the former is excluded, the latter bleeds to death. An ambassador is to deliver the whole message with which he is charged. He is to omit no part of it, but must declare the mind of the sovereign he represents, fully and without reserve. He is to say neither more nor less than the instructions of his court require, else he comes under displeasure, perhaps loses his head. Let the ministers of Christ weigh this well” (Jerome Zanchius, 1562).

Moreover the Gospel is to be preached “to every creature” (Mar 16:15), that is, to all who frequent the Christian ministry, whether Jew or Gentile, young or old, rich or poor. All who wait upon the ministrations of God’s servants have a right to hear the Gospel fully and clearly, without any part of it being kept back. Now an important part of the Gospel is the doctrine of election—God’s eternal, free, and irreversible choice of certain persons in Christ to everlasting life. God foreknew that if the success of the preaching of Christ crucified were left contingent upon the response made to it by fallen men there would be a universal despising of the same. This is clear from, “They all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luk 14:18). Therefore did God determine that a remnant of Adam’s children should be the eternal monuments of His mercy, and accordingly He decreed to bestow upon them a saving faith and repentance. That is Good News indeed—all rendered certain and immutable by the sovereign will of God!

Christ is the supreme Evangelist and we find this doctrine was on His lips all through His ministry. “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” “For the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 11:25-26; 24:22; 25:34). “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without [i.e. the pale of election], all these things are done in parables” (Mar 4:11). “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luk 10:20). “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.” “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 6:37; 10:26; 15:16).

The same is true of the greatest of the apostles. Take the first and chief of his epistles, which is expressly devoted to an unfolding of “the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). In the eighth chapter, he describes those who are, “the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28), and in consequence of which they were “foreknown” and “predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). The whole of the ninth chapter is devoted thereto. There he shows the difference which God made between Ishmael and Isaac, between Esau and Jacob, the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy. There he tells us that God has “mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:18). Nor were these things written to a few persons in some obscure corner, but addressed to the saints at Rome, “Which was, in effect, bringing this doctrine upon the stage of the whole world, stamping an universal imprimatur upon it and publishing it to believers at large throughout the earth” (Zanchius).

The doctrine of election is to be preached, third, because the grace of God cannot be maintained without it. Things have now come to such a sorry pass that the remainder of this article ought really to be devoted unto the elucidation and amplification of this important point, but we must content ourselves with some brief remarks. There are thousands of Arminian evangelists in Christendom today who deny predestination, either directly or indirectly, and yet suppose they are magnifying divine grace. Their idea is that God, out of His great goodness and love, has provided salvation in Christ for the whole human family, and that such is what He now desires and seeks. It is the view of these men that God makes an offer of His saving grace through the Gospel message, makes it to the freewill of all who hear it—and that they can either accept or refuse it. But that is not “grace” at all!

Divine grace and human worthiness are as far apart as the poles, standing directly opposed the one to the other. But not so is the “grace” of the Arminian. If grace is merely something which is offered to me, something which I must improve if it is to do me any good, then my acceptance thereof is a meritorious act and I have ground for boasting. If some refuse that grace and I receive it, then it must be (since it is wholly a matter of the freewill of the hearer) because I have more sense than they have, or because my heart is more tender than theirs, or because my will is less stubborn. And were the question put to me, “Who maketh thee to differ?” (1Co 4:7), then the only truthful answer I could make would be to say, I made myself to differ, and thus place the crown of honour and glory upon my own head.

To this it may be replied by some, We believe that the heart of the natural man is hard and his will stubborn, but God in His grace sends the Holy Spirit, and He convicts men of sin and in the day of His visitation melts their hearts and seeks to woo them unto Christ—yet they must respond to His “sweet overtures” and cooperate with His “gracious influence.” Here the ground is forsaken that it is wholly a matter of man’s will. Yet here, too, we have nothing better than a burlesque of divine grace. These very men affirm that many of those who are the subjects of these influences of the Spirit resist the same and perish. Thus, those that are saved, owe their salvation (in the final analysis) to their improving of the Spirit’s overtures—they “cooperate” with Him. In such a case, the honours would be divided between the Spirit’s operations and my improvement of the same. But that, too, is not “grace” at all!

There are still others who seek to blunt the sharp edge of the Spirit’s sword by saying, We believe in the doctrine of predestination, though not as you Calvinists teach it. A single word serves to untie this knot for us—“foreknowledge.” Divine election is based upon divine foreknowledge. God foresaw who would repent of their sins and accept Christ as their Saviour, and accordingly He chose them unto salvation. Here again human merits are dragged in. Grace is not free, but tied by the “decision” of the creature. Such a carnal concept as this reverses the order

of Scripture, which teaches that the divine foreknowledge is based upon the divine purpose—God foreknows what will be because He has decreed what shall be. Note carefully the order in Acts 2:23 and Romans 8:28 (last clause) and 29. Nowhere does Holy Writ speak of God foreseeing or foreknowing our repentance and faith. It is always foreknowledge of persons and never of acts—“whom he did foreknow” and not “what he did foreknow.”

But does not Scripture say, “Whosoever will, may come”? It does, and the all-important question is, where does the willingness come from in the case of those who respond to such an invitation? Men in their natural condition are unwilling. As Christ declared, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40). What, then, is the answer? This, “Thy people [says the Father to the Son—see context] shall be willing [to come] in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3). It is divine power, that, and nothing else, which makes the unwilling willing, which overcomes all their enmity and obstinacy, which impels or “draws” them to the feet of the Lord Jesus. The grace of God, my readers, is far more than a lovely concept to sing about—it is an almighty power, an invincible dynamic, a principle victorious over all resistance. “My grace [says God] is sufficient for thee” (2Co 12:9). It asks for no assistance from us. “By the grace of God [and not by my “cooperation”] I am what I am” (1Co 15: 10), said the apostle.

Divine grace has done far more than make possible the salvation of sinners. It makes certain the salvation of God’s chosen ones. It not only provides salvation for them, it brings salvation to them, and it does so in such a way that its honours are not shared by the creature. The doctrine of predestination batters down this Dagon idol of “freewill” and human merits, for it tells us that if we have indeed willed and desired to lay hold of Christ and salvation by Him, then that very will and desire are the effect of God’s eternal purpose and the result of the efficacious workings of His grace, for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. And therefore do we glory only in the Lord and ascribe all the praise unto Him. This writer sought not the Lord, but hated, opposed, and endeavoured to banish Him from his thoughts—but the Lord sought him, smote him to the ground (like Saul of Tarsus), subdued his vile rebellion, and made him willing in the day of His power. That is grace indeed—sovereign, amazing, triumphant grace!

Fourth, the doctrine of election is to be published because it abases man. Arminians imagine that they do so by declaring the total depravity of the human family, yet in their very next breath they contradict themselves by insisting on their ability to perform spiritual acts. The fact is that “total depravity” is merely a theological expression on their lips which they repeat like parrots for they understand not nor believe the terrible import of that term. The fall has radically affected and corrupted every part and faculty of our being, and therefore if man is totally depraved it necessarily follows that unto sin our wills are completely enslaved. As man’s apostasy from God resulted in the darkening of his understanding, the defiling of his affections, the hardening of his heart, so it brought his will into complete bondage to Satan. He can no more free himself than can a worm under the foot of an elephant.

One of the marks of God’s people is that they have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phi 3:3) and nothing is so well calculated to bring them into that state as the truth of election. Shut out divine predestination and you must bring in the doings of the creature, and that makes salvation contingent, and thus it is neither of grace alone nor of works alone, but a nauseating mixture. The man who thinks he can be saved without election must have some confidence in the flesh, no matter how strongly he may deny it. Just so long as we are persuaded that it lies in the power of our own wills to contribute anything, be it ever so little, unto our salvation, we remain in carnal confidence, and therefore are not truly humbled before God. It is not until we are brought to the

place of self-despair—abandoning all hope in our own abilities—that we truly look outside of ourselves for deliverance.

When the truth of election is divinely applied to our hearts we are brought to realize that salvation turns solely on the will of a sovereign God—“is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God which sheweth mercy” (Rom 9:16). When we are granted a feeling sense of those words of Christ’s, “without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5), then our pride receives its death-wound. So long as we entertain the mad idea that we can lend a helping hand in the business of our salvation, there is no hope for us. But when we perceive, by God’s grace, that we are clay in the hands of the divine Potter to be molded into vessels of honour or dishonour as pleases Him—then we shall renounce our own strength, despair of any self-assistance, and pray and submissively wait for the mighty operations of God—nor shall we pray and wait in vain.

Fifth, election is to be preached because it is a divinely-appointed means of faith. One of the first effects produced in serious minded hearers is to stir them unto earnestly inquiring, Am I one of the elect, and to diligently examine themselves before God. In many instances this leads to the painful discovery that their profession is an empty one, resting on nothing better than some “decision” made by them years before under emotional stress. Nothing is more calculated to reveal a sham conversion than a Scriptural setting forth of the birth marks of God’s elect. Those who are predestinated unto salvation are made the subjects of a miraculous work of grace in their hearts, and that is a vastly different thing from a creature act of “deciding for Christ” or becoming a member of some church. Far more than a natural faith is required to unite the soul unto a supernatural Christ.

The preaching of election acts as a flail in separating the wheat from the chaff. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom 10:17), and how can “the faith of God’s elect” (Ti 1:1) be begotten and strengthened if the truth of election be suppressed? Divine foreordination does not set aside the use of means, but ensures the continuation and efficacy of them. God has pledged Himself to honour those who honour Him and that preaching which brings most glory unto the Lord is what He most blesses. That is not always apparent now, but it will be made fully manifest in the day to come when it will be seen that much which Christendom regarded as gold, silver, and precious stones, was naught but wood, hay, and stubble. Salvation and “the knowledge of the truth” are inseparably connected (1Ti 2:4), but how can men arrive at a saving knowledge of the truth, if the most vital and basic part of it is withheld from them?

Sixth, election is to be preached because it incites to holiness. What can possibly be a more powerful incentive to piety than a heart which is overwhelmed by a sense of the sovereign and amazing grace of God! The realization that He set His heart upon me from all eternity, that He singled me out from many when I had no more claim upon His notice than they had. The realization that He chose me to be an object of His distinguishing favour—giving me unto Christ—inscribing my name in the Book of Life, and at His appointed time bringing me from death unto life and giving me vital union with His dear Son! This indeed will fill me with gratitude and cause me to seek to honour and please Him. God’s electing love for us begets in us an endless love for Him. There are no motives so sweet or so potent as the love of God constraining us.

Seventh, election is to be preached because it promotes the spirit of praise. Said the apostle, “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13). How can it be otherwise? Gratitude must find vent in adoration. A sense of God’s electing grace and everlasting love makes us bless Him as nothing else does. Christ

Himself returned special thanks unto the Father for His discriminating mercy, Matthew 11:25. The gratitude of the Christian flows forth because of the regenerating and sanctifying operations of the Spirit—it is stirred afresh by the redemptive and intercessory work of Christ—but it must rise still higher and contemplate the first cause—the sovereign grace of the Father—which planned the whole of our salvation. As then election is the great matter of thanksgiving unto God, it must be freely preached to His people.

## **THE HOLY SABBATH**

### *8. Its Observance*

Last month, we pointed out that the essential principles which should regulate us in the keeping of the Sabbath day holy are a strict compliance with the letter of the fourth commandment and the discharge of the same in the spirit of the new covenant. It seems to us that such a combination will best enable to preserve the balance, delivering us, on the one hand, from unwarrantable laxity, and on the other, from undue rigour and Pharisaic excess. While it is to be emphatically insisted upon that the moral law is as much binding on us today as ever it was upon the Jews, yet it must also be as unmistakably affirmed that the Christian receives the law not from Moses but from the hands of Christ. It is not the irksome tasks of slaves, but the ready and joyous service of sons and daughters which God asks from believers.

It should be the diligent concern of the Christian to observe the Sabbath day and to perform the duties required therein with a frame of mind becoming God's dear children, and in a spirit answering to the freedom and liberty of the Gospel. We are to serve God in all things "in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom 7:6). That is to say, our obedience and worship is to be rendered unto God with a spirit of grace, joy, liberty, and a sound mind—and not in that darkness, dread, and servility which characterized the old covenant. In contrast from the blessed liberty wherewith Christ makes believers free, that which marked Judaism was a bondage frame of mind, so that their observance of the duties of the law, and consequently of the Sabbath, were rendered in a servile spirit.

The Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) pointed out three things tending thereto. First, the dreadful giving of the law on Sinai. The fearful phenomena which accompanied the promulgation of the law at that time was designed to strike terror not only into the generation who immediately witnessed it, but also throughout all generations of the Mosaic economy to awe the hearts of Israel with a dread and terror of it. In proof of this, we find the apostle declaring plainly that Mount Sinai "gendereth to bondage" (Gal 4:24). It was the very nature of Judaism to bring its subjects into a spiritually servile state, and consequently, although secretly on account of the ends of the covenant, they were children and heirs, yet they "differeth nothing from servants" (Gal 4:13). It is the grand dispensational change brought in by Christ that is treated of in Galatians 4.

Again—the re enforcement of the Adamic covenant, with the promise and threat of it, necessarily produced the same effect upon the nation of Israel, for that covenant was binding upon them throughout the whole continuance of Judaism. True, the moral law had a new use and end given unto it at Sinai, yet those who received it were so much in the dark, and the proposal of that new end and use was attended with so great an obscurity, that they could not look unto the comfort and liberty which was to be the grand outcome. "The law made nothing perfect," and

what was of grace in the administration of it was so veiled under typical ceremonies and shadows that they could not behold “the end” or design of that which was to be abolished (2Co 3:13)—where the same grand dispensational change is also discussed.

Finally, the affixing of the death penalty to the law increased this bondage. The grim prospect of death overshadowing disobedience would obviously inspire their service with terror, and this is exactly what it was designed to express and produce, so as to represent the original curse of the whole law (Gal 3:13). Thereby the majority of them were greatly awed and terrified, though a few of them, by special grace, were enabled to delight themselves in God and His holy ordinances. By these things, then, was administered a “spirit of bondage again to fear,” which by the apostle is opposed to “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father” (Rom 8:15). From those things arose the many anxious scruples which were upon them in the observance of the Sabbath. Though they boasted they were the children of Abraham and never in bondage, yet the Saviour insisted that, whatever they pretended, they were not free until the Son should make them free (Joh 8:36).

If it were needful for the apostle to remind the believing Hebrews that they did not go to Sinai, but to Mount Sion, to receive the law, it is requisite that believers be taught the same today. “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:18 24).

Under the Gospel, Christians are delivered from all the terror-provoking considerations which brought the Jews into such spiritual bondage. They are connected with a radically different order of things, for “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal 4:26), which is but another way of saying that we receive the law of our obedience from Jesus Christ, who speaks from Mount Sion, and who is to be heeded with a filial spirit of liberty (cf. Gal 5:1). So far as Christians are concerned, the Adamic covenant is absolutely abolished, nor is the remembrance of it anyway revived (Heb 8:13), so that it should have any influence upon their minds. They have been taken into a covenant full of peace and joy, for “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Joh 1:17).

In the covenant of grace we receive the spirit of Christ or adoption to serve God without legal fear (Luk 1:74; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), and there is not anything more insisted on in the Gospel as the principal privilege thereof. Nor would it be of any account to have liberty in the word and rule, if we had it not in the spirit and principle. It is by this Gospel liberty we are delivered from that anxious solicitude about particular instances in outward duties, which was a great part of the yoke imposed by the system of Judaism. It is most important and needful that this principle of evangelical freedom be insisted upon (for though the fall has made us prone unto lawlessness, yet by nature we are also essentially legalistic), otherwise one of the most vital and fundamental elements of the Gospel will be submerged.

In all his duties, the Christian should look upon God as his Father, for through Christ both believing Jews and believing Gentiles have “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). Our Father is not one who will “always chide,” nor does He “watch our steps” for our hurt. He is not one who binds upon us a grievous burden, but “knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psa 103:14). He does not tie us down to rigid exactness in outward things, while we act in

a holy spirit of filial obedience as His children. There is a vast difference between the duties of servants and sons, as there is between obeying a master and a parent. The consideration and application of this principle, if it be regulated by the general rules laid down in the Word, will resolve a thousand such scruples as perplexed the Jews of old.

Let it also be observed that our Father requires to be worshipped “in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24). He has far more respect to the inward frame of our hearts wherewith we serve Him, than He does to the mere outward performance of duties. The latter can only be accepted by Him as they are the expressions and demonstrations thereof. If, then, in our observance of the Holy Sabbath our hearts are single and sincere in our desires for His glory with delight, it is of more price with Him than the most rigid and punctilious observance of external duties by number and measure. “It hath been no small mistake that men have laboured more to multiply directions about external duties, giving them out as it were by number or tale, than to direct the inward man unto a due performance of the whole duty of the sanctification of the day according to the spirit and genius of Gospel obedience” (John Owen, to whom we are indebted for much of the above).

Here, then, is the essential difference between the Judaical and the Christian Sabbath—the minds of believers are no longer influenced to the duties of its observance by the curse of the law and the terror thereof as represented in the threatened penalty of death. Instead it is love for the person of Jesus Christ and respect for His authority which are the springs of their obedience. This cannot be insisted upon too strongly, for it marks the difference between a slavish and filial compliance. Consequently our main duty lies in an endeavour to obtain spiritual joy and delight in the services of this day, as these are the special effects of spiritual liberty. Nor will this be difficult to attain if we are actively engaged in the privileges and blessings of the Gospel. The actings of faith upon the benefits secured for us by Christ cannot fail to produce deeper devotion, for faith ever works by love.

Those who have read this magazine for any length of time will scarcely need to be told that in what has been pointed out above we are far from joining hands with those who belittle the sanctity of the Lord’s Day and who contend that they are so delivered from the law that they are free to please themselves (within the limitations of decency) as to how they show their respect for this ordinance. There is a world of difference between spiritual liberty and fleshly license. Those whom Christ makes free are freed Godwards and not sinwards. The rule of obedience is the same for those who are now under the new covenant as it was for those under the old. It is the spring from which obedience proceeds which is altered. Then, it was the obedience of servants in terror of death for disobedience—now, it is the worship of sons out of gratitude to a loving Father.

Our first and chief concern must be to diligently see to it that the Lord is not robbed by us of any part of His due on the Sabbath day, yet care needs also to be taken that we are not brought under bondage to “the commandments and doctrines of men.” It has to be admitted that some, with a zeal which was not according to knowledge, felt that the sanctification of the Lord’s Day could best be secured by multiplying the duties of piety. Accordingly, they drew up excessive directions regarding the same, both proscribing and prescribing that which lacked Scriptural authority for the same under the Gospel. When such a strictness is required that the saints cannot come up to it with a delight therein, then we may rightly suspect that the requirements laid down by God have been exceeded and the inevitable result will be a swinging to the opposite extreme of laxity.

We cannot improve upon the ways of the Lord, and any attempt to do so must inevitably meet with failure. It is just as foolish to go beyond the rule which He has given us, as it is wrong for us to come short thereof. Where He has particularized we must not generalize and where He has

only generalized we should not dogmatically particularize. Is it not at this very point that one of the most outstanding differences between the two economies is to be found? Under the Mosaic, God furnished detailed laws for the Jews to heed—laws which pertained to every phase of their lives—but under the Christian, He has, in many instances, supplied us only with general principles for the regulation of our conduct. Considerable latitude is allowed us in the application of those principles to particular instances—as is clear from such passages as Romans 14:1-9; 1 Corinthians 8:8-9, etc. Those, then, who are not content with urging unto a compliance with such general principles, and instead, draw up a full code of specific regulations are contravening the genius of Christianity and inculcating the spirit of Judaism.

In order to prevent misunderstanding at this point, we call attention to one or two of the general principles enunciated in the epistles, to which we must ever turn for full-orbed Christianity. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). Here is expressed the fundamental principle for the regulating of practical godliness. This is the grand rule which is ever to guide us where express precepts are not supplied—self is to be denied and the eye fixed on God alone, so that we aim at honouring Him in everything. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Co 14:40). This is the general rule to regulate us in all the details of public worship as the former concerned more directly our domestic or private lives. It is a simple principle which, if heeded, will furnish guidance on many matters of church life concerning which the New Testament does not specifically legislate.

“Let all your things be done with charity” (1Co 16:14). If this were duly attended to, how many disputes would be avoided, ill-feelings spared, and difficulties solved? All our affairs, domestically and ecclesiastically, should be regulated by love. Earnestness must not degenerate into bitterness, nor firmness into tyranny. If zeal be governed by love then excesses and cruelty will be obviated. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col 3:23). Here is yet another general principle, which is to govern us in all our undertakings. Our service is not to be forced but spontaneous, rendered not grudgingly but gladly. It will be noted that the chief emphasis in these general principles is thrown upon the inward springs of action rather than upon the outward performances themselves, and that they afford room for the exercise of sanctified common sense, moral instincts, and Spiritual intuitions.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father” (Isa 58:13-14). This is one of the many Old Testament predictions which relates chiefly to Gospel times—the section in which it occurs clearly denoting this, coming as it does after the death of Christ in chapter 53. In it, we may clearly discern the two leading principles which we have contended for throughout this article—the maintenance of the letter of the fourth commandment, and a compliance therewith in the spirit of the new covenant. While there is much greater liberty under the Christian economy than there was under the Mosaic, yet the standard of holiness is not lowered nor are the requirements of God waived.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath” (Isa 58:13). This, it seems to us, has a twofold force—a general and a specific—if you refrain from trampling upon it, and if you abstain from journeying and gadding about on that day. The opening clause is explained by, “from doing thy pleasure on my holy day.” Fleshly indulgence is no more permissible now than it was under the old covenant. This prohibition is specified in three details, “not doing thine own ways nor finding

thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (Isa 58:13). The Lord’s Day is not to be spent in seeking our secular interests, nor by engaging in worldly recreations, nor by vain and trifling conversation. Positively, we are to “call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable” (Isa 58:13) which agree with Psalm 118:24. The reward for such obedience (Isa 58:14) must be understood of New Testament blessings expressed in Old Testament terminology.

## THE OPPRESSION OF MAN

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts” (Psa 119:134). In the former verse, the man of God had begged grace with respect to internal enemies—to the bosom enemy, the flesh—that no sin might have dominion over him. Now he begs for deliverance from external enemies. The saints are not only exercised with their corruptions, but also with the malice of wicked men. We have to do both with sin and sinners—with temptations and persecutions. And therefore he desires first to be kept from sin, and after that from danger and trouble. Both are a trouble to us—they were so to David, and God can and will in time give us deliverance from both.

In the text, we have, first, a prayer for mercy, “Deliver me from the oppression of man.” In the Hebrew, it is “from the oppression of Adam,” the name of the first father, for the posterity. This term is put either by way of distinction, aggravation, or diminution. 1. Man by way of distinction. There is the oppression and tyranny of Satan and sin—but the psalmist does not mean that now. 2. Man by way of aggravation. No creatures are so ravenous and destructive to one another as man. It is a shame that one man should oppress another. Beasts do not usually devour those of the same kind, but usually a man’s enemies are those of his own household. The nearer we are in bonds of alliance, the greater the hatred. We are of the same stock, and reason should tell everyone of us that we should do as we would be done to. Nay, of the same religion. We are cemented together by the blood of Christ, which obliges us to more brotherly kindness. And if we differ in a few things, we have more cause of alliance and relations enough to love one another more than we do. But for all this there is the oppression of man.

3. Man by way of diminution. To lessen the fear of this evil, the term “Adam” is given men, to show their weakness in comparison with God. Thou art God, but they that are so ready and forward to oppress and injure us are but men. Thou can easily overrule their power and break the yoke. I think this consideration chief because of other passages, “To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa 10:18). The oppressors are but men of the earth, a piece of red clay—frail men, that must within a while be laid in the dust. But it is more emphatically expressed, “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?” (Isa 51:12-13). When you have the immortal and almighty God to be your Protector, should you be afraid of a weak mortal man that is but Adam—a little enlivened dust? Within a little while he and all his fury is over and gone.

In the text we have, second, a resolution and promise of duty, “I will keep thy precepts.” This is a constant observation of all God’s commandments. If God would interpose for his rescue. But

did David do well to suspend his obedience upon so uncertain a condition? I answer—No. We must not understand it so as if he did bargain with God upon those terms and not otherwise, or as if before he had not kept them and would now begin to. No, he would keep them—only this would be a new engagement to press him to keep them more constantly and more accurately. Look throughout this Psalm and you shall find David still at his duty whatever his condition is. “The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law” (Psa 119:51)—there he is scorned, but not discouraged. “The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but have I not forgotten thy law” (Psa 119:61)—there he is plundered, yet not discouraged. “The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart” (Psa 119:69)—falsely accused but not discouraged. His meaning was not that he would serve God no longer unless He would deliver him, but that he should have a new obligation—this should engage us afresh. He does beforehand promise that he would walk with God more closely.

From the text thus opened, we have these points—First, deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in prayer. Second, when God delivers us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. Third, when we are praying for deliverance, we may interpose a promise for obedience. I will develop the first point by answering the question why and then show you how. Why? This may be strengthened by these reasons—

First, we have liberty to ask for temporal things. Many think it too carnal to pray for health, food and raiment, long life, temporal deliverance. But what God has promised we may lawfully pray for—a prayer is but a promise sued for. These blessings are adopted into the covenant, as being useful to us in our journey, and therefore we may ask for them. Christ has taught us to pray that we may ask, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Protection and maintenance we ask for, as well as pardon and grace. It conduces to the honour of God that we should ask these things of Him, that we may testify our dependence, and acknowledge His inspection and government over all the affairs of the world. “He hath prepared his throne for judgment” (Psa 9:7). Courts of justice among men are not always open to hear the plaintiff, but the Lord holds court continually. We may come to Him every day. He has prepared His throne to this end—to hear the petitions of His people when they are oppressed.

Second, our spiritual welfare is concerned in such temporal deliverances that we may serve God without impediment or distraction. The oppression of man is an impediment. It takes us away from many opportunities of service and bringing honour to God. “Pray ye that your flight be not in winter, neither on the sabbath day” (Mat 24:20). Though it were lawful, it was grievous to the body to have flight in winter—to the soul to have it on the Sabbath. “Oppression maketh a wise man mad” (Ecc 7:7). It will discompose our spirits. Therefore it being so that oppression is ever reckoned among the temptations, we may pray not to enter into it.

Third, the glory of God is concerned. His people will honour Him more if one, especially an eminent one, be delivered from the oppression of men, “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name” (Psa 142:7). Besides the honour done to God by His people, He will more manifest Himself and His justice to the world. “The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth” (Psa 9:16). The world is led by sense—God will not be regarded as a Friend to persecutors. In short, it is not for the honour of God that His people should be left under oppression, as if He sought not after and cared for their welfare. Note how the afflicted condition of the church is called “the reproach of the heathen” (Eze 36:30). The heathen would cast this in their teeth, as if their God had no respect for them or were not able to help them.

Fourth, prayer engages us to constancy. God's deliverance will be better for us than our own, that is, than those sinful shifts and ways of escape that we can devise. What we ask of God must be had in God's way. It binds us to seek no other way of escape than we can commend to God's blessing in prayer. It is said of the saints, they "were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb 11:35). Would any refuse deliverance when it is tendered to them? Yes, upon such spiteful conditions—they were commanded to do something contrary to the laws of God, and therefore they preferred God's deliverance and not their own.

Fifth, seeking deliverance at the hands of God does ease the heart of a great deal of trouble, and deliver it from those inordinate affections and tormenting passions which otherwise the oppression of man might raise in us—fear, grief, anger, envy, despair, dread to suffer more, sorrow for what we suffer already, anger and envy against those oppressors by whom we suffer, and despair because of the continuance of our molestations. All these are mischiefs to the soul, but can be cured by prayer.

1. Fear, because of the mightiness of them that oppress or threaten to oppress. We are told that "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Pro 29:25). We are full of distracting thoughts, and if we cherish them they will weaken our trust in God and dependence upon His promises. Nay, the mischief will not stop there. They who trust not God, can never be true to Him. We shall run to carnal shifts and fearing men more than God and do things displeasing to Him. But how shall we ease our hearts of this burden? By prayer? Partly, because then we use our fear aright when it only drives us to seek God's protection, "Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD" (2Ch 20:3). And partly because prayer discovers a higher object of fear—the fear of God drives out the fear of man. In God's strength we may defy enemies, see Psalm 27:1.

2. Grief. It clogs the heart and stays the wheels so that we drive on heavily in the spiritual life. Worldly sorrow works death (2Co 7:10). It brings on hardness of heart and quenches all our vigour. "By sorrow of heart the spirit is broken" (Pro 15:13). A heavy heart does little to the purpose for God. Now how shall we get rid of this? The cure is by prayer. For vent gives ease to all our passions. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). As when wind gets into the caverns of the earth, it causes terrible convulsions and earthquakes till it get a vent, so the mind is eased when we can pour out our care into the bosom of God and wait till deliverance comes from above.

3. The violent passions of anger, envy, and revenge against oppressors—these are all for naught and do a world of mischief. Anger discomposes us, and transports the soul into uncomely motions against God and men, making us fret, and tempting us to atheism (Psa 73), making us weary in well-doing (Psa 37). The devil works upon such discontent and we are apt to run into these disorders. How shall we get rid of these distempers? By prayer, in which we get a sight of the other world, and then these things will seem nothing to us. Prayer acquaints ourselves with God and the process of His providence, and so we shall see an end of things (Psa 73:17)—then all is quiet. And so for revenge, that, too, is an effect of the former. When we plead before God we see the justice of what is unjust and hard dealings from men to be justly inflicted by God, and so the heart is calmed—"the LORD hath bidden him curse" (see 2Sa 16:11). Our very praying is a committing ourselves to Him that judges righteously, and therefore we ought not, we need not, avenge ourselves.

4. Impatience and despair. This is a very great evil, contrary to faith and hope and dependence, which the Christian religion does mainly establish, and makes way for the worst ends—either

total apostasy from God, or atheism, or self-destruction. Now this is very detrimental to us when oppressions lie long upon us, “This evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?” (2Ki 6:33). “But thou saidst, There is no hope” (Jer 2:25). Desperate! No, “for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.” I will take my own course—there is no hope—it is vain to wait upon the Lord any longer. And even if things do not grow to that height, yet the children of God become wary and faint in their minds (Heb 12:3). Now we must keep afoot some hope while we have a heart to call upon God. The suit is still pending in the court of heaven when it seems to be over on earth, and we see there is cause to wait for God’s answer. “He that shall come will come” (Heb 10:37). God may tarry long, but will never come too late.

N.B. The above, slightly condensed, is part of a sermon by the Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677). The remainder of the sermon will appear in the February issue (D.V.).



# February

## UNWORTHINESS

It is impossible for the creature to do anything which merits anything at the hands of God, for even if he should fully perform his duty he is still an “unprofitable servant” (Luk 17:10). Doubly so is this the case with a fallen creature, for his entire record is one of demerit. He is an undischarged bankrupt, and has nothing with which to pay his just debts. Clemency from his Creditor is his only hope. It is at this very point that divine grace meets his deep need, for grace is favour shown to the undeserving and ill deserving. The grace of God abounds even unto the holy angels, but it superabounds toward the depraved descendants of Adam. It lay not within the power of the original denizens of heaven to do anything which entitled them to such high honours. It was grace pure and simple that made them the attendants of the King of kings. But to take on high those who have groveled in the miry clay of earth is favour shown to those who have earned the wages of eternal death.

Now when divine grace bestows salvation upon the ill deserving, it makes them conscious of the infinite favour that has been shown them. Fallen man is naturally proud, complacent, and self righteous. He credits to himself good marks to which he is not entitled, and those against him he denies or seeks to explain away. He prates of his religious performances (Luk 18) and considers himself entitled to even more than that which he receives from God (Mat 20:10-11). But wherever the miracle of regenerating grace is wrought, all this is reversed. Its subject is stripped of his peacock feathers, made poor in spirit, and humbled into the dust before God. He is made painfully aware of the loathsome plague of his heart, given a sight of his vileness in the light of God’s holiness, and brought to realize that he is a spiritual pauper, dependent upon divine charity. He now readily acknowledges that he is a hell deserving sinner.

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant” (Gen 32:10). This is something more than the language of a particular individual who lived in the remote past. It is the confession made by all who are the recipients of the saving grace of God. Jacob was, in the leading features of his history, a representative character. Before he had done any good or evil, while yet in his mother’s womb, it was revealed that he was the elect and beloved of God (Rom 9:10-13). Yet the course followed by him in early life made it apparent that he was, “by nature a child of wrath even as others.” The distinguishing favour of God was shown to him at Bethel, where a fugitive from justice, alone, asleep on the bare ground, the Lord appeared to him. Severe trials then followed, but it was not until he was “greatly afraid and distressed” (Gen 32:7) that he took his proper place before the Lord. How blessed it is to be assured that “the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psa 46:7). The “God of Jacob” is the God of all who feel and acknowledge their utter unworthiness and their complete dependency on sovereign grace.

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear” (Mat 3:11). If Jacob is to be regarded as a representative believer (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob portraying the three sides of his character), then John the Baptist is surely to be looked upon as the prototype of the officers in Christ’s kingdom. One of the outstanding and identifying marks which distinguish His true under shepherds from the false is their deep and genuine humility. The public representatives of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart” (Mat 11:29) are themselves characterized by diffidence and modesty. They marvel at the honour bestowed upon them and own their utter undeservedness and unfitness for such a high calling. Thus it was with the man whom divine grace called to be our Lord’s forerunner. So far from being puffed up by the dignified position he held, he did not feel meet to unloose his Master’s shoes. Though the greatest of them born of women (Mat 11:11), his motto was, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Joh 3:30).

“The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof” (Mat 8:8). Here again we perceive the same leading effect which is produced in all of its subjects by the miracle of saving grace—pride is subdued, self is effaced, a sense of ill desert takes possession of the heart. In this instance, we behold one who belonged to that hard and haughty race, the Romans. He was a man of rank, an officer in Caesar’s army, accustomed to issuing orders to those under his authority. Beautiful is it to see the lion transformed into a lamb. He had appealed to the great Physician on behalf of a servant lying sick of the palsy. The blessed Saviour at once declared, “I will come and heal him.” whereupon he replied, “I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Mat 8:7-8). The sequel is instructive, “When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Mat 10:10). One of the elements of great faith is deep humility.

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not worthy [Greek] to be called an apostle” (1Co 15:9). “Least” not in the sight of God nor as venerated by the church, but “least” in his own estimation, as he wrote in another place, “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8). It was not that he was lacking in qualifications or gifts, but that he had such a sense of his pre-conversion sins. How meanly he thought of himself! He felt that he was unfit to fight under the banner of Christ, still less to be His chief lieutenant. What complete self abasement! “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10). The position he held, the authority he possessed, the success which attended his labours, were all freely ascribed to divine favour. Here is proof of what we said in our opening paragraph—where the saving grace of God operates, it produces a sense of ill desert. The most eminent Christians are always the most lowly ones; those honoured in Christ’s service are deeply conscious of their unprofitableness.

“Worthy is the LAMB” (Rev 5:12). This brief article would be incomplete did we fail to bring out the grand design of the divine favour. The operations of God’s grace are intended not only to abase its subjects but to exalt the Saviour. If those blessed workings produce in us a deep sense of our utter unworthiness, they also result in a profound conviction of the immeasurable worthiness of Christ. Beautifully is this portrayed in Revelation 5. Waiving the question as to exactly what is signified by the sealed book in the right hand of the throne sitter, attention is focused upon the fact that none in heaven or earth was worthy to open the same. This provides the background for the central figure, “The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book” (Rev 5:5). Infinite merits are possessed by Him, and all the inhabitants of heaven, angelic and human, unite in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake” (Psa 115:1).

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *13. The Law and Retaliation—Matthew 5:38-42*

That section of our Lord's sermon which we are now considering has been misunderstood and wrested by not a few fanatics attributing to it a meaning which is flatly contradicted by other passages. For this reason we deemed it necessary to enter into a detailed examination of its terms. Two articles have already been devoted thereto, but as these appeared in the 1939 volume, it is requisite for us to present a brief summary of the ground therein covered, that new readers may the better grasp what we now write. First, it has been shown that Christ is not here repealing a Mosaic statute and substituting in its place a more merciful and spiritual rule, but that He was engaged (as in the previous sections of this sermon) in refuting a serious error of the Scribes and Pharisees and in pressing the high requirements of the law.

The words, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Mat 5:38), occur three times in the Pentateuch. They enunciated one of the judicial laws which the Lord gave to Israel. That law was prescribed solely for the guidance and use of magistrates. Its design was threefold: to protect the weak against the strong, to serve as a salutary warning unto evil doers, and to prevent the judge from inflicting too severe a punishment upon those guilty of maiming others. As such it was a just, merciful, and beneficial law. If the principle of this statute—the infliction of corporal punishment on those convicted of crimes of violence—was universally and strictly enforced today, it would make this world a much safer place to live. But this law had been greatly perverted by the Jewish leaders—for instead of confining it to the magistrates, they had made a general application of it, teaching that it gave to each person the right to privately avenge his wrongs, and thereby they fostered the spirit of malice and condoned deeds of violence.

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Mat 5:39). This means that we are forbidden to take the law into our own hands and pay back an adversary as he has done to us—nobler principles and spiritual considerations are to actuate us. Nor is this precept in anywise peculiar to the New Testament. Such passages as Proverbs 20:22, 24:29, 25:21-22 expressly prohibit the taking of private vengeance. Our Lord, then, was continuing to press the high requirements of the moral law. It is to be duly noted, however, that neither the law nor the Gospel require from us an unqualified and universal non resistance to evil. There are times when an ignoring of wrongs done to us or of injuries inflicted upon us would obviously be a failure to perform our duty. We must never connive at the guilty escaping from justice nor in the slighting of it. Righteousness is to mark us in all our ways.

Graciousness and lawlessness are widely different things. Though gladly willing to forego our own rights, we must not neglect the rights of others, by turning loose on society those who would imperil its security. When a brother trespasses against us, he must be challenged and not winked at. If he is unreasonable and impenitent, the matter must be brought before the church. Should he still prove to be defiant and rebellious, then he is to be punished by being disfellowshipped (Mat 18:15-17). Christ Himself resisted evil in the temple, when He found His Father's house had been turned into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves (Joh 2:13-17). The office of the magistrate is a divine ordinance, and we are morally bound to support and co operate with it. Notwithstanding, we must never appeal to the law in a spirit of malice and revenge, but rather because God has appointed and the good of society requires it.

But on the other hand, exceptions do not nullify a rule, rather do they serve to prove it. In turning from the strict letter of the precept, we must beware of losing its spirit. The disciple of

Christ, the Prince of Peace, is to be a man of peace, meekly enduring wrong, patiently suffering loss, accepting hardships graciously. Not only are we to refrain from the act of retaliation, but even the desire itself must not be allowed, for God requires holiness of heart as well as of life. All malice and bitterness, wrath and clamour, evil-speaking and unkind gestures, are to be put off—and bowels of mercy, compassion, and longsuffering put on—anything less is a falling short of the Christian standard. Not only are we to refrain from returning evil for evil, but we must return good for evil, blessing those who curse us and praying for those who spitefully use us.

In what immediately followed, Christ amplified His, “Resist not evil,” by three examples wherein He shows how men are to behave themselves when they are wronged. First, “But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat 5:39). Under these words are expressed all injuries done to men’s bodies, not only by words and blows, but also in the contempt of their persons, which is intimated by the reference to the “right cheek.” Usually men strike with the right hand and the blow falls on the left cheek, so that if the right cheek be smitten it is commonly with the back of the hand—a blow of contempt, which is even more provoking of retaliation than one given in anger. Nevertheless, says Christ, even such a blow must not be returned, for the taking of private revenge is strictly prohibited. Let the old saying be remembered—it takes two to make a quarrel—though the aggressor be guilty of provocation, yet it is the second party who gives consent to a quarrel if he hits back.

“But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat 5:39). There has been some controversy in certain quarters as to whether or not these words are to be understood literally. The question may be answered more readily by asking, Are they to be regarded absolutely or comparatively? Obviously, it must be the latter. First, were we to turn the other cheek to the smiter we should be tempting him unto sin, by inviting him to repeat the offense, which is manifestly wrong. Second, the example of Christ Himself refutes such an interpretation, for when He was smitten upon the cheek He did not turn the other unto the smiter. Third, the second half of this verse must not be detached from the first. Resist not evil—no matter how provoking be the occasion. “Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath” (Rom 12:19). Rather than be guilty of malice and violence, be willing to submit meekly to further insults.

Our Lord certainly did not mean by these words, “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mat 5:39). that we should court further wrongs, nor that in all cases we must meekly submit to such without any kind of resistance. When He was smitten before the high priest, He did not return blow for blow, but He did remonstrate against it. In so doing Christ was not actuated by a spirit of retaliation but of justice to His own character, and what He said had a tendency to convict the offender and the assembly. This precept is expressed in the strongest possible form to teach us that we must not render evil for evil, but rather suffer wrong, and submit to a repetition of an injury rather than go about to avenge ourselves. It is the principle rather than the act which is inculcated, Yet in certain circumstances a literal compliance would be right, which instead of disgracing us, would raise us in the esteem of the godly.

Christ here condemned the common practice of fighting and quarreling. Even though sorely provoked by another, He will not allow us to strike back. There is nothing to intimate that He disallowed the apostles from carrying swords for self-defense, but as soon as Peter drew his to resist the officers that came to apprehend Him in the garden, He bade him sheathe it again. In like manner, this precept reprehends the challenging unto a duel and also the acceptance of such—better be dubbed a coward by our fellow than disobey and displease the Lord. If it be said that it is a disgrace to show the white feather, the reply is that it is true grace to abstain from sinning. Mark

it well that a slap in the face is a vastly different thing from life itself being endangered. Where that is the case, flight or calling for the help of the law is our duty. Yet we must seek to defend ourselves rather than be killed.

“And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also” (Mat 5:40). The first example cited by Christ concerned insults to our persons, this one has to do with wrongful attacks upon our possessions. It sets forth another characteristic of evil men, namely, to prey upon the goods of their fellows, either privately or under cover of law. Such a one was Zacchaeus before his conversion, for he had enriched himself by “false” or fraudulent methods (Luk 19:8). But understand that all who resort to what are called “tricks of the trade,” all who trade upon the ignorance of their fellows by means of “shady” devices, all who are successful in the courts as the result of employing tricky lawyers, are—no matter what be their reputation for shrewdness in the world—in the sight of God, evil men and therefore the Christian must have no fellowship with such.

It is to be duly noted that this second example respects one of a trifling character. As the former concerned not the severance of a limb by the sword, but only a slap in the face, so this relates not to the seizure of our property but merely the loss of a garment. Unless this be duly noted, we are likely to miss the force of our Lord’s exhortation and make an entirely unwarrantable application. That which Christ here condemned was not the legitimate use of the courts, but the going to law over mere trifles. The doing so evidences a contentious spirit and a heart that is anxious for revenge, which ill becomes a Christian, as the apostle shows in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. It is all too common a practice among men in general, rather than enter into litigation over the loss of a coat—the costs entailed in such a procedure often being more than the purchasing of a new garment—far better to suffer the loss of it.

“In cases of great importance, other duties may require him to avail himself of the protection of the law. Justice to his creditors and to the public, and even to his family, may require him to defend his estate and to give a check to the exorbitance of unreasonable men. A Christian may prosecute a criminal out of love of public justice, though not from private revenge. Yet there will generally be men of the world enough to deal with such predators and a disciple of Christ will seldom have occasion to waste his time or lose his temper about them” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821). Thus, on the one hand, we must guard against anything which would encourage evil in the wicked, and on the other, conduct ourselves as those whose affections are set upon things above. Divine wisdom and grace are necessary if we are to properly preserve the balance here.

The ruling of our own spirit is far more important than the clothes which we wear. The preservation of inward tranquility is of greater price than a coat or a cloak. Here our Lord teaches us to set lightly by our temporal goods, that our time and strength may be devoted to the concerns of eternity. Nothing more surely unfits us for the pursuit of holiness than a heart which is resentful at and contentious with others. Angry passions and the workings of a spirit of revenge disqualify us for the worship of God. Meekness and lowliness of heart are the graces which we particularly need to learn of Christ. Though there may be cases where duty requires us to take legal action against one who defrauds us, yet this must be our last resort, for it is extremely difficult to handle tar without the fouling of our garments.

“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Mat 5:41). The actual reference is to public transport service. The Roman troops had power to requisition able bodied men. Marching through a district, they could compel men to act as porters or guides within a certain area or limit—an illustration of which we have in the case of Simon of Cyrene being compelled to bear the cross of Christ (Mar 15:21). Such service was not popular. Often the

demand was inconvenient as well as laborious, and was apt to be rendered in a reluctant and complaining spirit. Christ's command is that even when service is constrained and unreasonable, it should never be performed in a sullen and slavish spirit, but cheerfully and in excess of the demand. Happily there remains but few occasions when we are impressed into the service of the state. But in every life there are circumstances that force unwelcome tasks. Every man has duties which are undertaken not of choice but of necessity—they should be performed readily and cheerfully.

This third example cited by Christ, in which He forbids us to resist evil, has to do with the deprivation or curtailment of our personal liberties. It is a case where superiors are guilty of wrong doing to their inferiors, wherein the injured one is prohibited from making resistance by way of private revenge. That which is inculcated is the abuse of authority and how the offended are to conduct themselves under the same—rather than give way unto bitter resentment, we must patiently bear the injustice, and even be ready to suffer the repetition thereof. The prohibition here made by Christ condemns all private reviling of the laws of the land, the railing of servants against what they deem to be unreasonable in their masters, and the refusal to pay our just dues.

In the example now before us we have noted a third kind of wickedness in evil men, namely, those in positions of power and authority wronging those who are under them, by infringing on their personal rights and unjustly cur-tailing their liberties. Those who are guilty of charging exorbitant rents, overworking their employees, robbing them of their Sabbath rest, and of grinding the faces of the poor, are—no matter what their rank, wealth, and honour in the world—evil men in the sight of God and as such they will meet with the due reward of their iniquities in the day to come. It is for this reason, among others, that we are forbidden to resist or retaliate. In due time the Judge of all will right every wrong and make it manifest to the whole universe that “the triumphing of the wicked is short” (Job 20:5).

“In reference to personal liberty there can be no doubt that next to the blessings of a good conscience and the hope of eternal life, it is one of the most valuable privileges. Every Christian and every man should be ready to do much and suffer much, in order to secure it and retain it for himself and others. Yet at the same time, he will not only patiently submit to every necessary burden and constitutional restraint, but in obedience to our Lord's precept he will bear much of the insolence of men—dressed up in a little brief authority—overlook many stretches of power, and endure even a variety of acts of oppression, rather than have recourse to violence and tumult” (John Brown, 1784-1858).

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Mat 5:42). This supplies a further illustration of that noble and generous spirit which the righteousness of Christ's kingdom requires of its subjects. That righteousness will not only deter them from standing on every point of individual rights, but it will incline them to do good unto others. Interpreting this precept in the light of its setting, it sets forth the positive side of our duty. Not only does Christ forbid men to requite evil for evil, but He commands them to return good for evil. It is better to give unto those who have no claims upon us, and to lend unto those who would impose upon kindness, than to cause strife by a selfish or surly refusal. Our possessions are to be held in stewardship for God and at the disposal of the real need of our fellows.

Unto those who object against the limitations we have placed upon the other precepts and the exceptions that have been pointed out, we would earnestly beg them to attend very closely to this one. Surely it is self evident that the application of this particular injunction is strictly qualified. No one with any real acquaintance of the Scriptures can suppose that Christ here imposed an indiscriminate charity as a Christian duty—that we are to give or lend to everyone that asks. One

of the growing curses of modern life is the ill advised charity of those who allow their sympathies to run away with them. Lending is to be done “with discretion” (Psa 112:5). The apostolic principle is, “That if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2Th 3:10). It is no part of duty—either of the individual or of the state—to maintain in idleness those who are too lazy to work. If the following passage be carefully pondered, the will of God for us in this matter may be readily perceived—Proverbs 3:27; 1 Corinthians 16:2-3; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:17.

## **THE LIFE OF ELIJAH**

### *2. The Prophet Himself*

Reviewing very briefly the ground covered in the previous article, we have seen, first, that the appearance on the scene of a prophet of God is indicative of a season of declension and departure from God, his message being necessitated by the gross failure of those who have preceded him. Second, that his chief work is to arouse the slumbering public conscience, to rebuke evil doers, to denounce iniquity, to call upon men to forsake their wickedness and return unto the Lord. Third, that his message is one which is unpalatable to the ungodly and empty professors of religion, for it deals with sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Fourth, that as he is no purveyor of pleasantries or tickler of ears, his mission is despised, and his message rejected by the masses, and only an insignificant remnant respond to his call.

Now Elijah appeared on the stage of public action during one of the very darkest hours of Israel’s sad history. He is introduced to us at the beginning of 1 Kings 17, and we have but to read through the previous chapters in order to discover what a deplorable state God’s people were then in. Israel had grievously and flagrantly departed from JEHOVAH, and that which directly opposed Him had been publicly set up. Never before had the favoured nation sunk so low. Fifty eight years had passed since the kingdom had been rent in two following the death of Solomon. During that brief period, no less than seven kings had reigned over the Ten Tribes, and all of them without exception were wicked men. Painful, indeed, is it to trace their sad course and still more tragic to behold is how there has been a repetition of the same in the history of Christendom.

The first of those seven kings was Jeroboam. Concerning him we read that he, “made two calves of gold and said unto them, It is too much for you to go to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made” etc. (1Ki 12:28-32). Let it be duty and carefully noted that the apostasy began with the corrupting of the priesthood, by installing into the divine service men who were never called and equipped by God!

Of the next king, Nadab, it is said, “And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin” (1Ki 15:26). He was succeeded to the throne by the very man who murdered him, Baasha (1Ki 15:27). Next came Elah, a drunkard, who in turn was a murderer (1Ki 16:8, 9). His successor, Zimri, was guilty of “treason” (1Ki 16:20). He was followed by a military adventurer of the name of Omri, and of him we are told, “But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities” (1Ki 16:25-26). The evil cycle was completed by Omri’s son, for he was even more vile than those who had preceded him.

“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him” (1Ki 16:30-31). This marriage of Ahab to a heathen princess was, as might fully be expected (for we cannot trample God’s law beneath our feet with impunity), fraught with the most frightful consequences. In a very short time, all trace of the pure worship of JEHOVAH vanished from the land and gross idolatry became rampant. The golden calves were worshipped at Dan and Beersheba, a temple had been erected to Baal in Samaria, the “groves” of Baal appeared on every side, and the priests of Baal took full charge of the religious life of Israel.

It was openly declared that Baal lived and that JEHOVAH ceased to be. What a shocking state things had come to pass is clear from, “And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1Ki 16:33). Defiance of the Lord God and blatant wickedness had now reached its culminating point. This is made still further evident by, “In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho” (1Ki 16:34). Awful effrontery was this, for of old it had been recorded, “Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn” (Jos 6:26). The rebuilding of the accursed Jericho was open defiance of God.

Now it was in the midst of this spiritual darkness and degradation there appeared on the stage of public action, with dramatic suddenness, a solitary but striking witness to and for the living God. An eminent commentator began his remarks upon 1 Kings 17 by saying, “The most illustrious prophet Elijah was raised up in the reign of the most wicked of the kings of Israel.” That is a terse but accurate summing up of the situation in Israel at that time. Not only so, but it supplies the key to all that follows. It is truly saddening to contemplate the awful conditions which then prevailed. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of divine testimony was hushed. Spiritual death was spread over everything and it looked as though Satan had indeed obtained complete mastery of the situation.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1Ki 17:1). God, with a high hand, now raised up a powerful witness for Himself. Elijah is here brought to our notice in a most abrupt manner. Nothing is recorded of his parentage or previous manner of life. We do not even know to which tribe he belonged, though from the fact that he was “of the inhabitants of Gilead” makes it likely that he pertained either to Gad or Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them. “Gilead lay east of the Jordan: it was wild and rugged; its hills were covered with shaggy forests; its awful solitude was only broken by

the dash of mountain streams; its valleys were the haunt of fierce wild beasts” (Frederick B. Meyer, 1847-1929).

As we have pointed out above, Elijah is introduced to us in the divine narrative in a very strange manner, without anything being told us of his ancestry or early life. We believe there is a typical reason why the Spirit made no reference to Elijah’s origin. Like Melchizedek, the beginning and end of his history is shrouded in sacred mystery. As the absence of any mention of Melchizedek’s birth and death was divinely designed to foreshadow the eternal Priesthood and Kingship of Christ, so the fact that we know nothing of Elijah’s father and mother, and the further fact that he was supernaturally translated from this world without passing through the portals of death, mark him as the typical forerunner of the everlasting prophet. Thus the omission of such details adumbrated the endlessness of Christ’s prophetic office.

The fact we are told that Elijah “was of the inhabitants of Gilead” (1Ki 17:1) is no doubt recorded as a sidelight upon his natural training—one which ever exerts a powerful influence on the forming of character. The people of those hills reflected the nature of their environment. They were rough and rugged, solemn and stern, dwelling in rude villages and subsisting by keeping flocks of sheep. Hardened by an open air life, dressed in a cloak of camel’s hair, accustomed to spending most of his time in solitude, possessed of sinewy strength which enabled him to endure great physical strain, he would present a marked contrast from the town dwellers in the lowland valleys, and more especially would he be distinguished from the pampered courtiers of the palace.

How young he was when the Lord first granted Elijah a personal and saving revelation of Himself we have no means of knowing, as we have no information upon his early religious training. But there is one sentence in a later chapter which enables us to form a definite idea of the spiritual calibre of the man—“I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts” (1Ki 19:10). Those words cannot mean less than that he had God’s glory greatly at heart and that the honour of His name meant more to him than anything else. Consequently, he must have been deeply grieved and filled with holy indignation as he became more and more informed about the terrible character and wide extent of Israel’s defection from JEHOVAH.

There can be little room for doubt that Elijah must have been thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, especially the first books of the Old Testament. Knowing how much the Lord had done for Israel, the signal favours He had bestowed upon them, he must have yearned with deep desire that they should please and glorify Him. But when he learned that this was utterly lacking, and as tidings reached him of what was happening on the other side of the Jordan—as he became informed of how Jezebel had thrown down God’s altars, slain His servants, and replaced them with the idolatrous priests of heathendom—his soul must have been filled with horror and his blood made to boil with indignation, for he was, “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts” (1Ki 19:10). Would that more of such righteous indignation filled and fired us today.

Probably the question which now most deeply exercised, Elijah was, How should he act? What could he, a rude, uncultured, child of the desert, do? The more he pondered it, the more difficult the situation must have seemed. And no doubt Satan whispered in his ear, You can do nothing, conditions are hopeless. But there was one thing he could do—betake himself to that grand resource of all deeply-tried souls—he could PRAY. And he did, as James 5:17 tells us, “He prayed earnestly.” He prayed because he was assured that the Lord God lived and ruled over all. He prayed because he realized that God is all mighty and that with Him all things are possible. He prayed because he felt his own weakness and insufficiency, and therefore turned to One who is clothed with might and is infinitely self sufficient.

But in order to be effectual, prayer must be grounded on the Word of God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him, and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). Now there was one particular passage in the earlier books of Scripture which seems to have been specially fixed on Elijah’s attention, “Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the LORD’s wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit” (Deu 11:16-17). That was the very crime of which Israel was now guilty. They had turned aside to worship false gods. Suppose, then, that this divinely-threatened judgment should not be executed, would it not indeed appear that JEHOVAH was but a myth, a dead tradition? And Elijah was “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts,” and accordingly we are told that “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (Jam 5:17). Thus we learn once more what true prayer is—it is faith laying hold of the Word of God, pleading it before Him, and saying, “Do as thou hast said” (2Sa 7:25).

“He prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (Jam 5:17). Do some of our readers exclaim, What a terrible prayer! Then we ask, was it not far more terrible that the favoured descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should despise and turn away from the Lord God and blatantly insult Him by worshipping Baal? Would you desire the thrice Holy One to wink at such enormities? Are His righteous laws to be trampled upon with impunity? Shall He refuse to enforce their just penalties? What conception would men form of the divine character if He ignored their open defiance of Himself? Let Scripture answer, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11). Yes, and not only so, but as God declared, “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (Psa 50:21).

Ah, my reader, there is something far more dreadful than physical calamity and suffering, namely, moral delinquency and spiritual apostasy. Alas, that this is so rarely perceived today! What are crimes against man in comparison with high handed sins against God? Likewise what are national reverses in comparison with the loss of God’s favour? The fact is that Elijah had a true sense of values. He was “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts” (1Ki 19:10), and therefore he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. Desperate diseases call for drastic measures. And as he prayed, Elijah obtained assurance that his petition was granted, and that he must go and acquaint Ahab. Whatever danger the prophet might personally incur, both king and his subjects should learn the direct connection between the terrible drought and their sins which had occasioned it.

The task which now confronted Elijah was no ordinary one and it called for more than common courage. For an untutored rustic of the hills to appear uninvited before a king who defied heaven was sufficient to quell the bravest—the more so when his heathen consort shrank not from slaying any who opposed his will, in fact who had already put many of God’s servants to death. What likelihood, then, was there of this lonely Gileadite escaping with his life? “But the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1). They who are right with God are neither daunted by difficulties nor dismayed by dangers. “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about” (Psa 3:6). “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (Psa 27:3). Such is the blessed serenity of those whose conscience is void of offense and whose trust is in the living God.

The hour for the execution of his stem task had arrived and Elijah leaves his home in Gilead to deliver unto Ahab his message of judgment. Picture him on his long and lonely journey. What were the subjects which engaged his mind? Would he be reminded of the similar mission on

which Moses had embarked, when he was sent by the Lord to deliver his ultimatum to the haughty monarch of Egypt? Well, the message which he bore would be no more palatable to the degenerate king of Israel. Yet such a recollection need in nowise deter or intimidate him—rather should the remembrance of the sequel strengthen his faith. The Lord God had not failed his servant Moses, but had stretched forth His mighty arm on his behalf, and in the end had given him full success. The wondrous works of God in the past should ever hearten His servants and saints in the present.

## THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

### *13. Its Publication*

The value of this blessed doctrine appears in its suitability and sufficiency to stabilize and settle true Christians in the certainty of their salvation. When regenerated souls are enabled to believe that the glorification of the elect is so infallibly fixed in God's eternal purpose that it is impossible for any of them to perish, and when they are enabled to Scripturally perceive that they themselves belong to the people of God's choice—how it strengthens and confirms their faith. Nor is such a confidence presumptuous—though any other most certainly is so—for every genuinely converted person has the right to regard himself as belonging to that favoured company, since the Holy Spirit quickens none but those who were predestinated by the Father and redeemed by the Son. This is a hope which “maketh not ashamed,” for it cannot issue in disappointment when entertained by those in whose hearts the love of God is shed abroad by the Spirit (Rom 5:5).

The holy assurance which issues from a believing apprehension of this grand truth is forcibly set forth by the apostle in the closing verses of Romans 8. There he assures us, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:30). Such a beginning guarantees such an end—a salvation which originated in past eternity must be consummated in future eternity. From such grand premises Paul drew the blessed conclusion, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). And again, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?” (Rom 8:33). And yet again, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). If such precious streams issue from this fountain, then how great is the madness and how heinous the sin of those who desire to see it choked. The everlasting security of Christ's sheep cannot be presented in its full force until we base it upon the divine decree.

How apt the trembling believer is to doubt his final perseverance, for sheep (both natural and spiritual) are timid and self distrustful creatures. Not so the wild and wayward goats. True to their type, they are full of carnal confidence and fleshly boasting. But the believer has such a sense of his own weakness, such a sight of his sinfulness, such a realization of his fickleness and instability, that he literally works out his own salvation “in fear and trembling” (Phi 2:12). Moreover, as he sees so many who did run well doing so no longer. So many who made such a fair and promising profession end by making shipwreck of the faith—the very sight of their apostasy causes him to seriously question his own state and latter end. It is to stabilize their hearts that God has revealed in His Word that those who are enabled to see in themselves the marks of election may rejoice in the certainty of their everlasting blessedness.

Let us also point out what a stabilizing effect the apprehension of this grand truth has upon the true servant of God. How much there is to dishearten him—the fewness of those who attend his ministry. The opposition made to those portions of the truth which most exalt God and abase man. The scarcity of any visible fruits attending his labours. The charge by some of his officers or closest friends that if he continues along such lines he will have no one at all left to preach to. The whisperings of Satan that God Himself is frowning on such efforts, that he is a rank failure and had better quit—these and other considerations have a powerful tendency to fill him with dismay, or tempt him to trim his sails and float along the tide of popular sentiment. We know whereof we write, for we have personally trod this thorny path.

Ah, but God has graciously provided an antidote for Satan’s poison and an effectual cordial to revive the drooping spirits of His sorely tried servants. What is this? The knowledge that their Master has not sent them forth to draw a bow at a venture, but rather to be instruments in His hand of accomplishing His eternal decree. Though He has commissioned them to preach the Gospel unto all who attend their ministry, yet He has also made it plain in His Word that it is not His purpose that all or even that many should be saved thereby. He has made it known that His flock is (Greek) a “very little” one (see Luk 12:32), that there is only “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5), that the “many” would be found on the broad road that leads to destruction and that only a “few” would walk that narrow way that leads unto life.

It is for the calling out from the world of this chosen remnant and for the feeding and establishing of them that God chiefly employs His servants. It is the due apprehension and personal belief of this which tranquilizes and stabilizes the minister’s heart as nothing else will. As he rests upon the sovereignty of God, the efficacy of His decrees, the absolute certainty that God’s counsels shall be fully realized—then he is assured that whatever God has sent him forth to do must be accomplished, that neither man nor devil can prevent it. Appalled by the ruin all around him, humiliated by his own sad failures, yet he perceives that the outworking of the divine plan is infallibly ensured. Those whom the Father ordained will believe (Act 13:48). Those for whom the Son died must be saved (Joh 10:16). Those whom the Spirit quickens shall be effectually preserved (Phi 1:6).

When the minister receives a message to deliver in the name of his Master he may rest with unshaken confidence on that promise, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it [not “may”] shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:11). It may not accomplish what the preacher wishes nor prosper to the extent which the saints desire, but no power on earth or in hell can prevent the fulfillment of God’s will. If God has marked out a certain person to be brought unto a saving knowledge of the truth under a particular sermon, then no matter how buried in sin that soul may be, nor how hard he may kick against the pricks of conscience, he shall (like Paul of old) be made to cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Act 9:6). Here, then, is a sure resting place for the minister’s heart. This was where Christ found consolation, for when the nation at large despised and rejected Him, He consoled Himself with the fact that, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (Joh 6:37).

The value of this doctrine appears again in that it provides real encouragement to praying souls. Nothing so promotes the spirit of holy boldness at the throne of grace as the realization that God is our God and that we are the people of His choice. They are His peculiar treasure, the very apple of His eye, and they above all people have His ear. “Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him” (Luk 18:7). Assuredly He shall do so, for they are the only ones who supplicate Him in meekness, presenting their requests in subjection to His sovereign

pleasure. O, my readers, when we are on our knees, how this fact that God set His heart upon us from everlasting must inspire fervency and faith. Since God chose to love us, can He refuse to hear us?! Then let us take courage from our predestination to make more earnest supplication.

“But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him” (Psa 4:3). “‘But know.’ Fools will not learn, and therefore they must again and again be told the same thing, especially when it is such a bitter truth which is to be taught them—the fact that the godly are the chosen of God, and are, by distinguishing grace, set apart and separated from other men. Election is a doctrine which unrenewed man cannot endure, but nevertheless it is a glorious and well-attested truth, and one which should comfort the tempted believer. Election is the guarantee of complete salvation, and an argument for success at the throne of grace. He who chose us for Himself will surely hear our prayers. The Lord’s elect shall not be condemned nor shall their cry be unheard. David was king by divine decree and we are the Lord’s people in the same manner—let us tell our enemies to their faces that they fight against God and destiny, when they strive to overthrow our souls” (Charles H. Spurgeon, 1834-1892).

Not only does a knowledge of the truth of election afford encouragement to praying souls, but it supplies important instruction and guidance therein. Our petitions ought ever to be framed in harmony with divine truth. If we believe in the doctrine of predestination we should pray accordingly. The language we use should be in agreement with the fact that we believe there are a company of persons chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and that it was for them, and them alone, He suffered and died. If we believe in particular redemption (rather than in an universal atonement), we should beg the Lord Jesus to have respect unto such as He has purchased by His soul’s travail. This will be a means of keeping up right apprehensions in our own minds, as it will also be setting a proper example in this matter before others.

In the present day there are many deplorable expressions made use of in prayer, which are utterly unjustifiable, yea, which are altogether opposed to the will or Word of the Lord. How often the modern pulpit asks for the salvation of all present, and the head of the household requests that not one in the family miss eternal glory. To what purpose is this? Are we going to direct the Lord, who He shall save? Let us not be misunderstood—we are not against the preacher praying for his congregation, nor the parent for his family—that which we are opposed to is that praying which is in direct opposition unto the truth of the Gospel. Prayer must be subordinated to the divine decrees, otherwise we are guilty of rebellion. When praying for the salvation of others, it should always be with the proviso, “If they be thine elect” or “If it be Thy sovereign will,” or with some similar qualification.

The Lord Jesus has left us a perfect example in this, as in everything else. In His great High Priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, we find Him saying, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (Joh 17:9). Our Lord knew the whole of His Father’s good will and pleasure towards the elect. He knew that the act of election was a sovereign and irreversible act in His mind. He knew that He Himself could not add one to the number of the chosen. He knew that He was sent from the Father to live and die for them, and them only. And in perfect agreement with this He declared, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world.” If, then, Christ left out the world—if He prayed not for the non elect, neither should we. We must learn of Him and follow His steps, and instead of resenting, be well-pleased with the whole good pleasure of God’s sovereign will.

To be submissive unto the divine will is the hardest lesson of all to learn. By nature we are self-willed and anything which crosses us is resented. The upsetting of our plans, the dashing of our cherished hopes, the smashing of our idols stirs up the enmity of the flesh. A miracle of grace is

required in order to bring us into unrepining acquiescence to God's dealings with us, so that we say from the heart, "It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good" (1Sa 3:18). And in bringing this miracle to pass, God uses means. He impresses on our hearts an effectual sense of His sovereignty so that we are brought to realize that He has the unqualified right to do as He pleases with His creatures. And no other truth has such a powerful tendency to teach us this vital lesson as has the doctrine of election. A saving knowledge of the fact that God chose us unto salvation begets within us a readiness for Him to order all our affairs, till we cry, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luk 22:42).

Now in view of all these considerations, we ask the reader, ought not the doctrine of election be plainly and freely proclaimed? If God's Word be full of it. If the Gospel cannot be Scripturally preached without it. If the grace of God cannot be maintained when it is suppressed. If the proclamation of it abases man into the dust. If it be a divinely appointed means of faith. If it be a powerful incentive unto the promotion of holiness. If it stirs in the soul the spirit of praise. If it establishes the Christian in the certainty of his security. If it be such a source of stability to the servant of God. If it supplies encouragement to praying souls and affords valuable instruction therein. If it works in us a sweet submission to the divine will—then shall we refuse to give unto God's children this valuable bread merely because dogs snap at it? Shall we withhold from the sheep this vital ingredient of their food simply because the goats cannot digest it?

And now, in conclusion, a few words on how this doctrine should be published. First, it ought to be presented basically. This is not all incidental or secondary truth, but one of fundamental importance, and therefore it is not to be crowded into a corner, nor spoken of with bated breath. Predestination lies at the very foundation of the entire scheme of divine grace. This is clear from Romans 8:30, where it is mentioned before effectual calling, justification, and glorification. It is clear again from the order followed in Ephesians 1, where election (Eph 1:4) precedes adoption, our acceptance in the Beloved, and our having redemption through His blood (Eph 1:5-7). The minister must therefore make it clear to his hearers that God first chose a people to be His peculiar treasure, then sent His Son to redeem them from the curse of the broken law, and now gives the Spirit to quicken them and bring them to everlasting glory.

Second, it ought to be preached fearlessly. God's servants must not be intimidated by the frowns of men nor deterred from performing their duty by any form of opposition. The minister of the Gospel is called upon to, "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2Ti 2:3), and soldiers who fear the foe or take to flight are of no service to their king. The same holds good of those who are officers of the King of kings. How fearless was the apostle Paul! How valiant for the truth were Luther and Calvin, and the thousands of those who were burned at the stake because of their adherence to this doctrine. Then let not those whom Christ has called to preach the Gospel conceal this truth because of the fear of man, for the Master has plainly warned them, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" (Mar 8:38).

Third, it is to be preached humbly. Fearlessness does not require us to be bombastic. The holy Word of God must ever be handled with reverence and sobriety. When the minister stands before his people they ought to feel by his demeanour that he has come to them from the audience chamber of the Most High, that the awe of JEHOVAH rests upon his soul. To preach upon the sovereignty of God, His eternal counsels, His choosing of some and passing by of others, is far too solemn a matter to be delivered in the energy of the flesh. There is a happy medium between a cringing, apologetic attitude, and adopting the style of a political tirade. Earnestness must not

degenerate into vulgarity. It is “in meekness” we are to instruct those that oppose themselves, “if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2Ti 2:25).

Fourth, it is to be preached proportionately. Though the foundation be of first importance, it is of little value unless a superstructure be erected upon it. The publication of election is to make way for the other cardinal truths of the Gospel. If any doctrine be preached exclusively it is distorted. There is a balance to be preserved in our presentation of the truth—while no part of it is to be suppressed, no part of it is to be made unduly prominent. It is a great mistake to harp on one string only. Man’s responsibility must be enforced as well as God’s sovereignty insisted upon. If on the one hand, the minister must not be intimidated by Arminians, on the other, he must not be brow beaten by hyper Calvinists, who object to the calling upon the unconverted to repent and believe the Gospel (Mar 1:15).

Fifth, it is to be preached experimentally. This is how the apostles dealt with it, as is clear from, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). But how can this be done unless we are taught the doctrine of election, instructed in the nature and use of it? The truth of election can be of small comfort to any man until he has a well grounded assurance that he is one of God’s chosen people, and that is possible only by ascertaining that he possesses (in some measure) the Scriptural marks of Christ’s sheep. As we have already dealt with this aspect of our subject at some length, we will say no more.

May it please the Lord to raise these poor articles unto His own glory and the blessing of His dear saints.

## **THE HOLY SABBATH**

### *8. Its Observance*

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (Isa 58:13). We quote this passage again because it sums up what we have sought to bring before the reader in our last two articles. First, it expresses the grand truth that the Sabbath is not to be looked upon as an irksome duty, but as a sacred privilege. Instead of being a burden grievous to be borne, it affords us a special opportunity for profitable and joyous exercises. The spirit in which we are to enter upon its hallowed employments is neither one of bondage nor dread, but of freedom and gladness. We are to find in it our greatest Joy of the week, delighting ourselves in the Lord, all that is within us praising His holy name.

The accompanying promises afford great encouragement for those whose sincere desire it is to honour the Lord in this ordinance, “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 58:14). Expressed in new covenant terms, that means, first, such an observance of the Sabbath will afford us much more comfort in the Lord. “The more pleasure we take in serving God, the more pleasure we shall find in it. If we go about duty cheerfully, we shall go from it with satisfaction” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). Second, we shall be given victory over our spiritual enemies. Observe how the Lord’s causing Israel to triumph over the Egyptians is spoken of as, “He made him ride on the high places of the earth”

(Deu 32:13). Third, our souls shall be richly fed with the blessings of the covenant. The precious products of the antitypical Canaan—fed with foretastes of it now.

Having fully established the two basic principles which are to regulate us in Sabbath observance, we must now point out something of the practical application of the same to the details of this duty. First, we will consider the preparation which should be made, for we cannot enter properly or profitably into the keeping of this holy rest without a fit approach thereto. It is noteworthy that this expression, “the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath” (Mar 15:42) occurs not in the Old Testament but in the New, being found in substance in each of the four Gospels. This sacred institution is not to be approached lightly and carelessly, but with definite forethought and conscientious preparation of our secular affairs, our domestic arrangements, and especially of our hearts. We greatly fear that it is failure at this very point which is the reason why so many miss the richest benefits of this ordinance.

Before proceeding further we must carefully consider the question as to when this “preparation” is to begin, and this requires us to fix the time at which the Sabbath itself commences. In certain quarters this has been made a point of controversy, some contending that it begins at sunset of the preceding day and ends with sunset of its own, appealing to, “from even unto even shall ye celebrate your sabbath” (Lev. 23:32). That this was one noteworthy feature of and obtained throughout the Mosaic economy is readily granted, but that the same is binding on us today we emphatically deny. In the first place, a day of rest, according to the rules of natural equity, ought to be proportioned unto a day of work, and that is reckoned both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as from morning to evening, Psalm 104:20 23; Matthew 20:1 8.

In the second place, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His resurrection gave beginning and being to the special day of holy rest under the Gospel, came forth from the grave not until the morning of the first day of the week, when the light of the sun began to dispel the darkness of the night, or when it dawned towards the day, as it is variously expressed by the evangelists. This should settle the matter for His people. Thus, the Christian Sabbath is again sharply distinguished from the Judaical Sabbath. Finally, it should be pointed out that in the description furnished of the first seven days of Genesis 1, that while it is said of each of the first six that it was constituted of an evening and a morning, yet of the seventh this is significantly omitted—it is simply called “the seventh day” (Gen 2:1), without any mention of the preceding evening. Thus the Mosaic was distinguished from the primitive Sabbath as well as from the Christian.

Our Sabbath, then, is to be regarded as extending from midnight of the seventh day (Saturday) till midnight of the first day. Thus the “preparation” for it would fall upon the Saturday, particularly the evening of that day. “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exo 20:8), includes the taking of all necessary forethought which is required for the sanctifying thereof. It is a profanation of the Lord’s Day to make it one of feasting, and therefore its meals should be as plain and simple as possible, and all cooking done on Saturday (Exo 16:23). The women who cared for our Lord’s body mixed the spices and ointments on the day preceding, considering it a servile work not suitable for the Sabbath (Luke 23:54-56). Has not this been recorded for our learning?

The due preparation of our hearts and minds is especially needful. As we are to keep our foot when going to the house of God (Ecc 5:1), that is, consider what we are about to do, to where we are going, and that which is due God in our solemn approaches unto Him. So we must not enter into the sacred exercises of His holy day without thought and prayer. “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me” (Lev 10:3) is the Lord’s unwavering requirement. He is greatly dishonoured

when we carelessly rush into any of the appointed means of grace, and therefore does the apostle exhort us, “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). This means far more than grave countenances and bodily postures of veneration. Let us have hearts and minds that are spiritualized.

Our first concern should be to see to it that our minds are freed from the worries of business and the cares of this life, so that they may without distraction be stayed upon the Lord. Much converse with the world is very apt to beget a worldly frame of mind in us, and being so much absorbed with earthly things during the six working days taints the heart with worldliness. Though it be our duty in all our secular concerns to live unto God therein and do everything unto His glory, yet they exert such an influence upon us as to unfit us for spiritual exercises and heavenly contemplation. And therefore it devolves upon us to purge our minds of secular affairs, business concerns, and worldly cares, as far as in us lies, so that we may the better and more wholly rest in and delight ourselves with the Lord.

In endeavouring to bring our souls into a fit frame for the duties of the Lord’s Day, the evening before we should engage our thoughts with meditations suitable thereto. This is a fitting time to consider the lost Sabbaths of our unregenerate days, and which we have to account for or repent of. This is the time to review the week now nearly ended, and put right with God our sad failures therein. Then is the time to meditate upon the wondrous patience of God, which has so long borne with our waywardness and slackness, and who notwithstanding has spared us to approach another Sabbath. This is the time to ponder the vanity of worldly things and how utterly contemptible they are when compared with communion with God. This is the time to give ourselves up to confession, to prayer, to praise.

As our eyes open upon the light of the Sabbath we should most earnestly pray that we may be preserved from trifling away its holy hours, and seriously should we ask ourselves how we may most profitably improve them. We ought to be very importunate with God that He will graciously banish from our minds everything which would distract and turn us away from Him, that He would so sanctify our hearts that from the beginning to the end of His day we may be entirely given up to those ends and exercises for which He has consecrated the Sabbath. We ought also to be equally importunate in praying that He will grant His ministers the assistance of the Holy Spirit in preparing a message which will glorify Him and edify His people. So, too, we should ask the Lord for the same spiritual mercies to be bestowed upon our fellow saints as we have craved for ourselves. This will serve to prepare us to engage in family devotions, before we wait upon the public worship of the day.

Throughout the Sabbath we are to abstain from everything that would impede its spiritual observance. Under no circumstances must there be any buying or selling on that Day, or the encouraging of those who do so. Sunday newspapers and all secular literature is to be then strictly banned by us. The paying of social calls and the making of unnecessary visits whereby the worship of God in families is interrupted and worldly conversation is introduced are desecrations of the Sabbath. All unnecessary work in providing for our dining tables on that day is to be avoided—a cold meal with God’s blessing is infinitely better than a hot one with His frown. Great watchfulness must be exercised against idle conversation. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29)—that holds good at all times, but doubly so on the Sabbath.

All needless taking of journeys on the Lord’s Day are sinful. In this connection we would earnestly remind the reader of that exhortation of Christ’s, “But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day” (Mat 24:20). This was plainly a prophetic warning against

that species of Sabbath desecration which has, alas, become so rife. It is rendered the more striking inasmuch as it is the only warning He gave to His disciples against any particular kind of encroachment on the day of rest. And for what does He here teach them to pray? Not that they may be kept from travelling for pleasure or for purposes of commerce, but that in a time of calamity and danger events might be so ordered by God that they should not be obliged to preserve their lives and flee for safety by travelling on that day. How He wished to impress upon us the unique sanctity of the Sabbath!

Turning now to the positive side—the reading and pondering of the Scripture should have a prominent place in the occupations of this day. In our strenuous age there are comparatively few who have many leisure hours through the week, and often they are too weary to use those they do have for serious study. But it is far otherwise on the day of rest. Special opportunity is then afforded for seeking spiritual nourishment. At least one hour in the early morning, another in the afternoon, and one more before retiring, ought to be spent in the Word of God and devotional literature. As six days have been directed mainly to providing for the needs of the body, the seventh is to be improved by seeking food for the soul—thereby is our strength renewed and we are fitted for the duties of the ensuing week.

In addition to seasons of private prayer and feeding on the Word, all our spare moments on the Lord's Day should be employed in spiritual meditations. Then is our golden opportunity for serious reflections and delightful contemplation—to turn our thoughts from things temporal to things spiritual, and to project our minds into that eternal state to which we are constantly approaching. We should meditate on God as Creator and delight ourselves afresh in all His wondrous works. We should consider how we lost our original rest in God by sin, and how He might justly have abandoned us to eternal restlessness. We should meditate upon the recovery of our rest in God by the great atonement of Christ and His triumphant emerging from the grave. This is indeed the principal duty of this day—to dwell upon and rejoice in this recovery of a rest in God and of a rest for God in us. This is the fruit of infinite wisdom, amazing grace, and incomprehensible love. Then let us give glory to God and His Christ for the same. We are also to remember that the Sabbath is a pledge of our everlasting rest with God.

Let it also be observed that this day affords the most favourable opportunity for training children in the fear and nurture of the Lord. Family instruction is one of the most important duties thereof. How many thousands owe their conversion, under God, to Sabbath catechising, Scripture reading, and religious instruction, and the simple but fervent prayers of a pious parent or relative! The heads of families should do all they can to promote the spiritual and eternal good of those under their care. No Christian parent should entrust the instructing of his children in the things of God to only Sunday School teachers, but ought to personally discharge much of this responsibility. Let portions of the Word be read together, simple explanations and practical applications be made. Verses should be allotted for memorizing during the week, with a hearing of the same on the Sabbath. Such books as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the life of some missionary, etc., may also be profitably read to the children.

This is also a season eminently suitable for works of charity. All possible doubt on this score has been removed by the specific teaching and personal example of Christ. He affirmed that it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath Day. It is both our privilege and duty, especially of those without family responsibilities, to seek after and minister unto those who are cut off from the public means of grace: to visit the sick and the aged, to read the Word to those who cannot read it for themselves, to engage in acts of mercy and compassion unto those needing our help. The more we endeavour to brighten the lot of others, the more will we enter into the joy of Him who ever

went about doing good. It is always the self centered who are the most discontented and miserable.

We heartily endorse the following observations from the Puritan, Owen (John, 1616-1683). “There is no such certain standard or measure for the observance of the duties of this day, as that every one who exceeds it should by it be cut short, or that those who on important reasons come short of it should be stretched out thereunto. As God provided in His services of old that he who was not able to offer a bullock might offer a dove, with respect unto their outward condition in the world, so here there is an allowance also for the natural temperaments and abilities of men. Only whereas if persons of old had pretended poverty to save their charge in the procuring of an offering, it would not have been acceptable, yea, they would themselves have fallen under the curse of the deceiver. So no more now will a pretense of weakness or natural inability be an excuse for any neglect or profaneness. Otherwise, God requires of us and accepts from us according to what we have, and not according to what we have not.

“We see it by experience that some men’s natural spirits will carry them to a continuance in the outward observance of duties much beyond, nay, doubly perhaps to what others are able, who yet may observe the holy Sabbath to the Lord with acceptance. And herein lies the spring of the accommodation of these duties to the sick, the aged, the young, the weak, or persons any way distempered. God ‘knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust’ (Psa 103:14). so also that the dust is more discomposed and weakly compacted in some than others. As thus the people gathered manna of old, ‘some more, some less’...every man according to his eating,’ yet he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack’ (see Exo 16:17 18). So is everyone in sincerity, according to his own ability, to endeavour the sanctifying of the name of God in the duties of this day, not being obliged by the examples or prescriptions of others, according to their own measures.”

Commenting on the cautions of Isaiah 58:13, Owen said, “I no way think that here is a restraint laid on us from such words, ways, and works, as neither hinder the performance of any religious duties belonging to the due celebration of the worship of God on His day, nor are apt in themselves to unframe our spirits or divert our affections from them. And those whose minds are fixed in a spirit of liberty to glorify God in and by this day of rest, seeking after communion with Him in the ways of His worship, will be to themselves a better rule for their words and actions, than those who may aim to reckon over all they do or say, which may be done in such a manner as to become the Judaical Sabbath much more than the Lord’s Day.

“Although the day be wholly to be dedicated to the ends of a sacred rest before insisted on, yet duties in their performance drawn out to such a length as to beget wearisomeness tend not to edification, nor promote the sanctification of the name of God in the worship itself. Regard therefore in all such performances is to be had unto the weakness of the natural constitution of some, the infirmities and indisposition of others who are not able to abide in the outward part of duties as others can. And there is no wise shepherd who will rather suffer the stronger sheep of his flock to lose somewhat of what they might reach to in his guidance of them, than to compel the weaker to keep pace with them to their hurt, and it may be to their ruin. Better a great number should complain of the shortness of some duties, who have strength and desires for a longer continuance in them, than that a few who are sincere should be really discouraged by being overburdened, and have the service thereby made useless to them.”

We cannot do better to close this article than by giving the prayer of the godly Baxter (Richard, 1615-1691),—“O most glorious and gracious Creator and Redeemer, I humbly return my unfeigned thanks for the unspeakable mercies which I have received on Thy Day, and much

more, for so great a mercy to all Thy churches and the world. And craving the pardon of the sins which I have committed on Thy Day, I beseech Thee to continue this exceeding mercy to Thy churches and to me, that its blessed privileges and comforts may not be forfeited and lost. And let me serve Thee in the life and light and love of Thy Spirit in these Thy holy days on earth, till I be prepared for and received into the everlasting rest in heavenly glory. Amen.”

## THE OPPRESSION OF MAN

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts” (Psa 119:134). But how is this to be asked? First, this is not to be asked as our main blessing, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” (Mat 6:33). If we seek our ease and temporal felicity only, that prayer is like a brutish cry, “And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds” (Hos 7:14). A dog will howl when he feels anything inconvenient. You will never be freed from murmuring and quarrelling at God’s dispensations and questioning His love, if this be the first thing that you seek and so your prayers will become your snare. Besides the great dishonour to God, it argues the great disorder of your affections that you can be content to have anything apart from God, “Seek the LORD, and his strength: seek his face evermore” (Psa 105:4). In all conditions that must be our great request, that we may have the favour of God.

Second, it must be asked with submission. It is not absolutely promised, nor intrinsically and indispensably necessary to our happiness, but if the Lord sees fit for His own glory and our good. We cannot take it ill if a friend refuses to lend us a sum of money which he knows will be to our loss and detriment. God sees fit, sometimes, for His own glory and our good, to continue us under oppression, rather than take us out of it. There are two acts of Providence—relieving and comforting the oppressed, and punishing the oppressors. Sometimes God does the one without the other, sometimes both together. Sometimes God will only comfort the oppressed. We cry to Him in our afflictions, and God will not break the yoke but give us strength to bear it, “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3). He gives you strength to bear the burden, if you continue in your integrity. Sometimes God does punish the oppressor, yet that is no relief to you. You must bear it, for you are to stand to God’s will and to wait His leisure to free you from it.

Third, your end must be that God may be glorified and that you may serve Him more cheerfully. So it is in the text. And again, “Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: that I may shew forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: and I will rejoice in thy salvation” (Psa 9:13-14). David begs salvation in order to praise. Temporal mercy should not be loved for itself, nor sought for itself, but as we may glorify God by it—that is to be our end. Lord, I seek not my own interest, but Thine. If you have a carnal end, you miss, “Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (Jam 4:3)—that ye may please the flesh.

Fourth, we must pray in faith, that God can deliver from the oppression of man, and will do so in due time, when it is good for us. Though our oppressors be ever so mighty, God can break their power or change their heart. It is a great relief to the soul to consider the several ways that God has to right us. “Then had the churches rest...and were multiplied” etc. (Act 9:31). When was that? When Paul was converted. He was an active instrument against the church and God turned his heart—then had the churches rest. Or the Lord may do it by determining their interests that

they shall show favour to His people though their hearts be not changed, “When a man’s ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7). Please men, and you cannot say God is your Friend, but please God and He makes your enemies at peace with you. There is much in the secret chain of Providence, see Daniel 1:9. God can break the yoke by raining judgments on them, see Isaiah 49:24-25. Therefore we should not be discouraged with unlikelihood when we go to God, who has many ways which poor shortsighted creatures cannot foresee.

God is ready to deliver us. The love which the Lord has for His afflicted people will not suffer His justice to be quiet very long. That God is ready to help and deliver will appear from these things. 1. It is His nature to pity and show mercy to the oppressed and to revenge the oppressor. He pities the afflictions of them that suffer justly, and far beneath their desert, from His own hand, “They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Jdg 10:16 and cf. 2Ki 14:26)—how much more will He pity them that are unworthily oppressed! And the Lord’s pitiful nature does incline Him to deliver His people and when the oppressed cry, “I will hear; for I am gracious” (Exo 22:21-27).

2. It is His usual practice and custom, “The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed” (Psa 103:6). If for all—surely for His people. He sits in heaven to rectify the disorders of men, see Psalm 34:19. 3. It is His office as Judge of the world, “Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud” (Psa 94:2). Look upon Him only in that notion, according to our natural conceptions, as the supreme cause and Judge of all things. Again, His office as Protector of His people. He is in covenant with them. He is their sun and shield, His people’s refuge in time of trouble (Psa 9:9), when they have none else to flee to.

Now for instruction to teach us what to do when we are oppressed. First, patience. It is the lot of God’s children to be often troubled with the world and badly used. Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, and his subjects cannot endure those who would overturn his kingdom. The good are few, and therefore must look to be oppressed. If there be any breathing room it is God’s mercy. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Ti 3:12 and cf. Gal 4:29).

Second, let us be prepared to commend our cause to God, “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear: to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa 10:17-18). God prepares the hearts of the humble. How so? By continuing the trouble till they are sensible of the misery of the sin—of the cause. “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face” (Hos 5:15).

Third, when you have prayed, then wait. It is a good sign when we are engaged in prayer and encouraged to wait. When God has a mind to work, He sets the spirit of prayer at work. How can our prayers be heard when we regard them not ourselves and expect no issue? How should God hear when we pray out of course and do not think our prayers worth the regarding? “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry” (Psa 40:1). “I will... watch to see what he will say” (Hab 2:1). Look for an answer. God does not usually disappoint a waiting people.

When God delivers us from the oppression of man we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. First, because every mercy infers an answerable duty, “But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him” (2Ch 32:25). There must be rendering according to the receiving. Second, this is the fittest return, partly because it is real, not verbal. The Lord cares not for words—He knows the secret springs of the heart, see Psalm 50:23. It is good to be

speaking good of God's name. This is one way of glorifying, but ordering the conversation aright is that which is most pleasing to Him. And partly, too, because our fear and sorrow are taken away, "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psa 119:32 and see Luk 1:74-75).

We are now under the sad effects of our former unthankfulness, and by remembering our duty we may see our sin. Ingratitude and walking unanswerably to received mercy is the great and crying sin of God's people. Therefore we should humble ourselves that we did so little good and that God had so little glory and service from us in former times of liberty. Now God by His present providence shows us the difference, "Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies," etc. (Deu 28:47-48 and see 2Ch 12:8). We must be humbled for the abuse of former mercies before we seek new.

Thus we may know (from the second part of our text) what to have in our eye when we are asking for mercies. The end is first in intention, though last in execution. Do not pray to serve thy lusts more freely, nor think how to execute revenge, nor how we should be provided for—but what glory and service we may bring to God, see Psalm 75:2. It also teaches us how to make our promises to God. When you promise duty and obedience to Him, be sure to be sincere and holy—make due provision that it may be so by mortifying the roots of such distempers as will betray us. When a people in a low condition have a real inclination to praise and glorify God by their mercies as soon as they shall receive them, it is an argument that He will hear.—Thomas Manton, 1620-1677.



# March

## PEACE

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (Joh 14:27). Nowhere do the moral perfections of Christ appear more blessedly than in the peace which ever possessed His soul! There was nothing in His outward lot calculated to produce composure of mind and satisfaction of heart, but rather everything to the contrary. What did the world give to the Lord Jesus that would produce contentment? A manger for His cradle, the mountain side for His sleeping chamber, a cross on which to die. What was there in His circumstances or earthly portion which made for serenity of spirit?—what of external comforts, material riches, social prestige, human fame? Not only was there the absence of those things which are mostly prized by men, but there was the presence of their opposites—that which usually occasion repinings. Yet we never see Him ruffled or hear Him complaining—perfect peace ever possessed His heart.

Never was the peace of anyone so severely tested and tried as was that of Christ’s, yet nothing ever disturbed it to the slightest degree. No matter what the provocation, He ever remained calm and unperturbed. “When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not” (1Pe 2:23). When His enemies spat in His face and plucked out His hair, there was no angry retort. Lack of appreciation from those whom He befriended embittered not His spirit. The vilest of charges were hurled against Him, the foulest indignities were heaped upon Him, yet they only served to demonstrate the unadulterated mildness of His temper. When affronted and ridiculed, He calmly bore their insults. When contradicted by presumptuous sinners, He endured, with the utmost tranquility, their unreasonable cavils. Most gloriously did He make it manifest that He was “the Prince of Peace.”

As courage can only be displayed in the midst of danger, as perseverance requires prolonged difficulty and trial for its exemplification, so the virtue of peace needs provocation and opposition if its blessedness is to be made fully evident. And therefore did divine providence so order the path of our Redeemer that it might the more conspicuously appear that there was no conceivable experience which could disturb His equanimity. In public and in private, from foe and friend, in life and in death, He was antagonized and assaulted, but His perfect placidity remained unruffled. When enduring the inconceivable agonies of Gethsemane, with strong crying and tears, and bloody sweat, His disciples slumbered and slept. Did their slighted Master express hot resentment at such unkind treatment? No, far from it, He threw the mantle of charity over their failure to watch with Him for one hour, saying, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mat 26:41).

Let us now endeavour to examine more closely this lovely grace so eminently displayed by the Lord Jesus. What was the nature of His peace? What were the essential elements which comprised it? First, an unshakable confidence in the divine providence. Nothing is more effectual

in stabilizing the mind and tranquilizing the heart as a firm and steadfast assurance that God controls and directs all the affairs of time. The Gospels record many examples of Christ's confidence therein. Take what is mentioned in Matthew 17:27, there were thousands of fish in that sea—why should this particular one, at this particular moment, be found with the necessary coin when Peter caught and opened its mouth? Take again the incident described in Matthew 21:2-3, a dozen things might have caused the owner of that ass to change his mind and go elsewhere—Christ's knowledge it would be there at that time was not only proof of His omniscience, but also of a particular providence that orders every detail. Once more, consider Matthew 8:24-28, why did Christ sleep so peacefully during the storm? Because He knew they were certain to reach "the other side" (Mat 8:28)—the government of God so ordered it.

Second, His unchanging trust in God—that constituted a marked feature of Christ's serenity. This is clear from, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa 26:3). Christ was the only one who ever enjoyed that perfect peace in its undisturbed fullness, because He was the only one whose mind was perpetually stayed on JEHOVAH. "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Psa 22:10). The Lord Jesus lived in complete dependence upon God throughout the whole of His earthly sojourn. He lived by faith on the precious promises of His heavenly Father. In Hebrews 2:11, the apostle Paul declares, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," and in proof thereof (Heb 2:13) he quotes Psalm 18:2, where the Messiah affirmed, "I will put my trust in him." Christ's trust in God evidenced Him to be one with His brethren, for in becoming the Son of man He was brought into a condition of trouble and distress wherein it was both His duty and privilege to count upon God for deliverance.

As this human perfection of the Saviour' is so feebly apprehended today, we will dwell upon it a little further. So far from belittling the character of our Lord, the fact that He lived in complete dependence upon God makes manifest His moral perfections. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint" (Isa 50:6-7). If those words do not set forth the life of faith, what language could do so? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom 8:33-34). How many of our readers are aware that that triumphant challenge of faith originally issued from the lips of the man Christ Jesus? Such indeed was the case, as a reference to Isaiah 50:8-9 clearly shows. At the very moment Pilate was condemning Him, Christ comforted Himself with the assurance that God would vindicate and declare Him righteous. Compare, too, His language in Psalm 16:8-10! That Christ made an open profession of His confidence in the Father is seen in the fact that His enemies reproached Him for "trusting in God" (see Mat 27:43).

Third, His unparalleled meekness. "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psa 37:11). Pride and self will lie at the root of all unrest and discontent, as they are responsible for our quarrelling with the dispensations of God. Dictators and disturbers of public peace are ever men of arrogance and self assertiveness. But the Prince of Peace could say, "Learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat 11:29). Meekness is the only virtue which will keep the affections and passions in their proper place and poise. Meekness is the only grace which makes one submissive to God and pleased with all that pleases Him. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass" (Mat 21:5).

Many are the contrasts between the world's peace and Christ's. The world wishes for peace, Christ alone can bestow it. The world's peace is carnal, shallow, and disappointing—but Christ's is spiritual, deep, and satisfying. The world's peace is a dearly bought one, but Christ's is free. The world's peace is generally an unrighteous one, but Christ's is holy. The world can only give peace after trouble, but Christ can impart peace in the midst of trouble, lifting the heart above it. The world's peace is evanescent, Christ's is lasting, for His gifts are without repentance. He is in one mind in continuing as well as bestowing—His motives are in and of Himself, and therefore always the same. He secures by His power what He gives by His love. His peace cannot be taken away from us. A tyrant once threatened a saint, "I will destroy your home"—you cannot destroy my peace. "I will confiscate your goods"—you cannot rob me of my peace. "I will banish you from your country"—I will take my peace with me. This peace is the legacy of the Prince of Peace to His subjects, but the measure in which they enjoy it is determined by their obedience to God, their surrender to His sovereignty, and their fellowship with Him, and their heart's occupation with their future bliss.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *14. The Law and Love—Matthew 5:43-48*

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Mat 5:43-44). Few sections of the Sermon on the Mount have suffered more at the hands of expositors than has this one. Most of them, through failure to attentively weigh and rightly understand the whole context, have quite missed the scope of our passage. In consequence of such failure, our Lord's design in these verses has been misapprehended, the prevailing but erroneous idea being held that they set forth the vastly superior moral standard of the new covenant over that which obtained under Judaism. Many have wrongly defined its principal terms, giving too restricted a meaning both to "neighbour" and "love." Ludicrous indeed are the shifts made by some in the endeavours to harmonize their interpretation of these verses with the theological system to which they are committed.

How widely the commentators differ among themselves, and how ambiguous and unsatisfactory are their explanations will appear from the following quotations—taken from their remarks on "Love your enemies." "We cannot have complacency in one that is openly wicked and profane, nor put a confidence in one that we know to be deceitful; nor are we to love all alike; but we must pay respect to the human nature, and so far honour all men: we must take notice, with pleasure of that even in our enemies which is amiable and commendable; ingenuity, good temper, learning, moral virtue, kindness to others, profession of religion, etc., and love that, though they are our enemies. We must have a compassion for them, and a good will toward them" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714). That seems to us about as clear as mud. First, this eminent author virtually tells us that we cannot love an enemy, then he affirms we must respect any good qualities we can discern in them, and closes with the statement that we should wish them well.

Much to the same effect are the reflections of Thomas Scott (1747-1821). He begins by asserting it is a Christian duty to love our enemies, to regard them "with benevolence, to return good works and kind wishes to their revilings and imprecations, and beneficent acts to their

injuries.” But he spoils this by adding—“As however there are various favours which He bestows only on His people, so our peculiar friendship, kindness, and complacency must and ought to be restricted to the righteous; yea, gratitude to benefactors and predilections for special friends consist very well with this general good will and good conduct toward enemies and persecutors.” Here again we are left wondering as to what our Lord really meant when He bade us “Love your enemies” (Mat 5:44).

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) sought to cut the knot by having recourse to the subtleties of the Schoolmen, who insisted there are two different kinds of love, both in God and in man—wherein they confounded mere kindness with love. This writer said, “Much confusion has arisen on this subject from not distinguishing between benevolence and complacency. The one is due to all men, whatever be their character, so long as there is any possibility or hope of their becoming the friends of God; the other is not, but requires to be founded on character” (“On Love to Enemies”). The substance of which is that the love we exercise unto the enemies of God is of a totally different order from that which we bear to His children.

Stranger still is the method followed by the renowned John Gill (1697-1771) in his effort to explain away Christ’s injunction that we must love our enemies. “I apprehend the love with which Christ exhorts His people to love their enemies is not to be understood quoad affectus (as respecting the internal affections of love). I cannot believe that Christ requires of me that I should love a persecutor as I do my wife, my children, my real friend, or brother in Christ—but quoad effectus (as to the effects), that is, I am required to do those things as they lay in my way and according to my ability, as a man would do to his neighbour whom he loves—that is, feed him when he is hungry, and give him drink when thirsty” (from “Truth Defended”).

The explanation given by Mr. Gill is the worst of them all, for it contains a most serious error, implying as it does that outward compliance with God’s requirements will be accepted by Him even though the one spring from which all such actions must proceed be inactive. It is not the outward appearance, but the heart, God ever looks at. Now, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10) and love is essentially a thing of the heart. Love is the fulfilling of the law, because love to God and to man is all that it requires. Real obedience is nothing more and nothing less than the exercise of love and the directing of it to what God has commanded. Strictly speaking, there is no ground for the distinction commonly made of internal and external obedience—all true obedience is internal, consisting in the exercise of love, and external obedience is simply the expression thereof. Consequently, external conformity to the divine commands which proceeds not from love—holy affections—is worthless “dead works.”

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy” (Mat 5:43). As we have passed from section to section of Matthew 5, we have warned against and sought to repudiate the widely held mistake that Christ was here setting up a more spiritual and merciful law than the one which had been given at Sinai. In the verse just quoted, we have additional proof, clear and conclusive, that our Lord was not engaged in pitting Himself against the law of Moses, but rather that He was concerned with the refuting and rejecting of the deadly errors of the Jewish teachers. The Pentateuch will be searched in vain for any precept which required the Israelites to entertain any malignity against their foes. Thou shalt “hate thine enemy” was a rabbinical invention pure and simple.

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18)—such was the original commandment. Now our Lord was not referring to this divine statute at all, but to the Pharisees’ perversion of the same. True, they quoted the actual words, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as

thymself,” but they misunderstood and misapplied it. The lawyer’s question to Christ, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luk 10:29), asked in order to “justify himself,” revealed the error of the party to which he belonged, as our Lord’s answer thereto made plain the scope of the term over which they stumbled. The Jewish rabbis restricted the word “neighbour” to friends or those closely related to them—to those of their nation and particularly those who belong to their own party.

The term “neighbour” is used in the Old Testament in a twofold manner—a wider and more general, and a narrower and more specific. In its common usage, it includes anyone with whom we may come into contact, having respect unto our fellow men. In its specific sense, it signifies one who is near to us by ties of blood or habitation. But anyone who searches the Scriptures should have been left in no uncertainty as to the Spirit’s meaning. “Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold” (Exo 11:2). The reference here is to the Egyptians among whom Israel then lived. “Strangers,” equally with “neighbours,” are represented as the proper objects of such a love as we bear to ourselves, and that, in the very chapter where the command to love our neighbour is recorded, “If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:33-34).

So far from the divine injunction, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev 19:18), being restricted to those who are amiable and friendly toward us, in more than one passage in the law even an adversary in a law suit is described as a neighbour, “When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and his neighbour” (Hebrew of Exo 18:16). Hence the inference, which the Pharisees should have drawn from the divine statute would be, “Thou shalt love all men, even those who are seeking to injure thee.” When God prohibited His people from bearing false witness against their neighbours, and when He forbade them coveting the wife of a neighbour (Exo 20:16-17), the prohibition must of necessity be understood without any limitation. Thus, the commandment to love their neighbours, properly understood, bade them to love all mankind.

As, then, this divine precept commanded the Israelites to love all men, it most certainly prohibited the harbouring of a malignant spirit against anyone. But not only did the Jewish rabbis unwarrantably restrict the injunction to love their neighbours, but they also drew from it the false and wicked inference, “and hate thine enemy.” How excuseless was any such conclusion appears from the fact that the command to love their neighbours was immediately preceded by the prohibition, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people” (Lev 19:18), while verse 34 bade them to love as themselves any stranger living in their midst. To cherish any ill-feeling against any enemy was directly opposed to both the letter and the spirit of the morality of the law—no such sentiment was expressed in any form of words.

How utterly opposed to the law itself was this evil conclusion of the rabbis will appear from the following Scriptures, “If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him” (Exo 23:4-5). “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the LORD see it, and it displease him” (Pro 24:17-18). “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink” (Pro 25:21). Nor were these unqualified precepts in anywise annulled by the special instructions Israel received through Moses and Joshua to destroy the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, for in so doing they were acting as the executioners of the righteous judgments of God upon those who were so corrupt and vile they were a public menace.

Nor were they bidden to hate those miserable wretches. No foundation, then, was laid in those extraordinary judgments on the Canaanites for the general principle that hatred to enemies is lawful.

It may be objected to what has been pointed out above that there are some passages which seem to make against our contention. For example, we find David saying, “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” (Psa 139:21-22). Upon these verses we may remark—first, we must distinguish sharply between private and public enemies. The former is one who has done us some personal injury—even so, we must not hate him or retaliate. The latter is one who is in open and inveterate revolt against God, a menace to His cause and people. Even so though we righteously hate his evil cause and sins, we must not hate him. So in the above passage, it was the public enemies of Israel and of God whom David hated.

From what has been before us we may see in the case of the rabbis two abuses of the Scriptures—dangerous and disastrous abuses—against which every teacher of the Word must most diligently guard, namely, misinterpretation and the drawing of seemingly logical but false inferences. How necessary it is that the terms of Holy Writ should be rightly defined, and what labour is demanded from the teacher (often the patient examination of scores and sometimes hundreds of verses to discover how the Spirit has used a particular term) in order to achieve this. Otherwise he is very liable to be guilty of causing error to pass for the truth. Doubly solemn is that exhortation, “My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Greek of James 3:1).

Again, from what has been before us we may discover an infallible mark of a false teacher—he is one who deliberately panders to the corrupt inclinations of his auditors, adopting his message to their perverted inclinations, wresting the Scriptures so as to secure their approbation. The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees was—Jews are required to love and do good unto their brethren after the flesh, but they are not only permitted, it is their bounden duty to cherish bitter enmity against the Gentiles. Such a doctrine was only too agreeable to the malignant and selfish principles of fallen human nature, and accordingly we find the Jews generally acted under its influence. “They readily show compassion to their own countrymen, but they bear to all others the hatred of an enemy” (Tacitus, 56-120). While Paul describes them as, “Contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved” (1Th 2:16).

Finally, we may behold here the fruit of false doctrine, namely, evil communications corrupting good manners. The Jews have ever been a people marked by strong passions—loving their friends fervently and hating their enemies intensely. From the Pharisees’ corrupting of the law of God so as to make it square with the prejudices of their disciples, the most evil consequences followed. Erroneous beliefs necessarily lead to erroneous conduct, for, “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” This principle is horribly exemplified in Roman Catholicism—their evil practices resulting from their false traditions. Thus, they regard their “places of worship” as more holy than any other buildings, and consequently many of the deluded Papists never engage in formal prayer except when they enter one of their “churches” or “cathedrals.”

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies” (Mat 5:44). From all that has been before us it should be quite plain that our Lord was not, in these words, pitting Himself against any Mosaic precept, nor even making an addition thereto. Rather was He purging that divine statute from the corruptions of the scribes and Pharisees, and revealing the scope and high spirituality of God’s precepts. The love which the divine law demands is something vastly superior to what we call “natural affection”—love for those who are nearest to us by ties of blood is but a natural instinct

or feeling—found in the heathen and in a lower degree among the animals. The love which the divine law requires is a holy, disinterested, and spiritual one. This is unequivocally established by the fact that our Lord linked inseparably together, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” and “thy neighbour as thyself” (Mat 22:37, 39)—our neighbour must be loved with the very same love that God is loved.

“But I—[God incarnate, the Giver of the original law]—say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mat 5:44). In these words Christ does three things. First, expressly refutes the error of the scribes and Pharisees who restricted the term “neighbour” unto friends and acquaintances, and shows that it is so all encompassing as to include “enemies”—verily, God’s command is “exceeding broad” (Psa 119:96). Second, He bluntly repudiates their evil teaching that an enemy is to be hated, affirming the very opposite to be the truth, insisting that God commands us to love even those who hate and injure us. Third, He makes crystal clear what is signified by “love,” namely, a holy, inward, and spiritual affection, which expresses itself in godly and kindly acts. Thus we are assured beyond any shadow of doubt that the Moral Law is of divine origin, for who among men had ever conceived such a precept as “love for enemies!”

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### *3. Before Ahab*

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa 59:19). What is signified by the enemy coming in “like a flood?” The figure used here is a very graphic and expressive one—it is that of an abnormal deluge which results in the submerging of the land, the imperiling of property and life itself, threatening to carry everything before it. Aptly does such a figure depict the moral experience of the world in general, and of specially favoured sections of it in particular, at different periods in their history. Again and again, a flood of evil has broken loose, a flood of such alarming dimensions that it appeared as though Satan would succeed in beating down everything holy before him, when by an inundation of idolatry, impiety, and iniquity, the cause of God upon earth seemed in imminent danger of being completely swept away.

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood” (Isa 59:19). We have but to glance at the context to discover what is meant by such language. “We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes...For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us...In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad” (Isa 59:9-15, see margin of v. 15). Nevertheless, when Satan has brought in a flood of lying errors, and lawlessness has become ascendant, the Spirit of God intervenes and thwarts Satan’s vile purpose.

The solemn verses quoted above accurately describe the awful conditions which obtained in Israel under the reign of Ahab and his heathen consort Jezebel. Because of their multiplied transgressions, God had given up the people to blindness and darkness and a spirit of falsehood

and madness possessed their hearts. In consequence, truth was fallen in the street—ruthlessly trampled underfoot by the masses. Idolatry had become the state religion. The worship of Baal was the order of the day. Wickedness was rampant on every side. The enemy had indeed come in like a flood, and it looked as though there was no barrier left which could stem its devastating effects. Then it was that the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him, making public demonstration that the God of Israel was highly-displeased with the sins of the people and would now visit their iniquities upon them. That heavenly standard was raised aloft by the hand of Elijah.

God has never left Himself without witnesses on earth. In the very darkest seasons of human history, the Lord has raised up and maintained a testimony for Himself. Neither persecution nor corruption could entirely destroy it. In the days of the antediluvians, when the earth was filled with violence and all flesh had corrupted His way, JEHOVAH had an Enoch and a Noah to act as His mouthpieces. When the Hebrews were reduced to abject slavery in Egypt, the Most High sent forth Moses and Aaron as His ambassadors, and at every subsequent period in their history one prophet after another was sent to them. So also has it been throughout the whole course of Christendom. In the days of Nero, in the time of Charlemagne, and even in the dark ages—despite the incessant opposition of the Papacy—the lamp of truth was never extinguished. And so here in 1 Kings 17, we behold again the unchanging faithfulness of God to His covenant, by bringing upon the scene one who was very jealous of His glory and who feared not to denounce His enemies.

Having already dwelt upon the significance of the particular office which Elijah exercised, and having looked at his mysterious personality, let us now consider the meaning of his name. A most striking and declarative one it was, for Elijah may be rendered, “My God is JEHOVAH,” or “JEHOVAH is my God.” The apostate nation had adopted Baal as their deity, but our prophet’s name proclaimed the true God of Israel. Judging from the analogy of Scripture, we may safely conclude that this name was given to him by his parents, probably under prophetic impulse or in consequence of a divine communication. Nor will this be deemed a fanciful idea by those acquainted with the Word. Lamech called his son Noah, saying, “This same shall comfort us [or be a rest to us] concerning our work” (Gen 5:29)—“Noah” signifying rest or comfort. Joseph gave names to his sons expressive of God’s particular providences to him (Gen 41:51-52). Hannah’s name for her son (1Sa 1:20) and the wife of Phinehas for hers (1Sa 4:19 22) are further illustrations.

We may observe that the same principle holds good in connection with many of the places mentioned in the Scriptures, Babel (Gen 11:9), Beersheba (Gen 21:31), Massah and Meribah (Exo 17:7), and Cabul (1Ki 9:13 margin) being cases in point. Indeed no one who desires to understand the sacred writings can afford to neglect a careful attention to proper nouns. The importance of this receives confirmation in the example of our Lord Himself, for when bidding the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam it was at once added, “which is by interpretation, Sent” (Joh 9:7). Again, when Matthew records the angel’s command to Joseph that the Saviour was to be named Jesus, the Spirit moved him to add, “All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat 1:22-23). Compare also the words “which is, being interpreted” in Acts 4:36; Hebrews 7:1-2.

It will thus be seen that the example of the apostles warrants us to educe instruction from proper names (for if not all of them, many embody important truths), yet this must be done with

modesty and according to the analogy of Scripture, and not with dogmatism or for the purpose of establishing any new doctrine. How aptly the name Elijah corresponded to the prophet's mission and message is at once apparent, and what encouragement every consideration of it would afford him! We may also couple with his striking name the fact that the Holy Spirit has designated Elijah "the Tishbite" (1Ki 17:1), which significantly enough denotes the stranger here. And we must also take note of the additional detail that he was, "of the inhabitants of Gilead," which name means rocky, because of the mountainous nature of that country. It is ever such a one whom God takes up and uses in a critical hour—a man who is out and out for Him, in separation from the religious evil of his day, and who dwells on high. A man who in the midst of fearful declension carries in his heart the testimony of God.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1Ki 17:1). This memorable event occurred some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. For the dramatic suddenness, the exceeding boldness, and the amazing character of it, there are few of a like nature in sacred history. Unannounced and unattended, a plain man, dressed in very humble garb, appeared before Israel's apostate king as the messenger of JEHOVAH and the herald of dire judgment. No one in the court would know much, if anything, about him, but he had just emerged from the obscurity of Gilead, to stand before Ahab with the keys of heaven in his hand. Such are often the witnesses to His truth which God has employed. At His bidding they come and go. Not from the ranks of the influential and learned do they issue. They are not the products of this world system, nor does the world place any laurels on their brow.

"As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1Ki 17:1). There is much more in this expression, "The LORD God of Israel liveth," than meets the eye at first glance. Observe that it is not simply, "The LORD God liveth," but "The LORD God of Israel," which is also to be distinguished from the wider term "The LORD of hosts." At least three things were signified thereby. First, "The LORD God of Israel" threw particular emphasis upon His special relationship to the favoured nation. JEHOVAH was their King, their Ruler, the One with whom they had to do, the One with whom they had entered into a solemn covenant. Second, Ahab is thereby informed that He lives. This grand fact had evidently been called into question. During the reigns of one king after another, Israel had openly mocked and defied JEHOVAH, and no dire consequences had followed, and so the false idea had come to prevail that the Lord had no real existence. Third, this affirmation, "The LORD God of Israel liveth" pointed a striking contrast from the lifeless idols whose impotency should now be made apparent—unable to defend their deluded votaries from the wrath of God.

Though for wise reasons of His own, God bears "with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22), yet He affords clear and sufficient proof throughout the course of human history that He is even now the Governor of the wicked and the Avenger of sin. Such a proof was then given to Israel. Notwithstanding the peace and prosperity which the kingdom had long enjoyed, the Lord was highly incensed at the gross manner in which He had been publicly insulted, and the time had arrived for Him to severely punish the wayward people. Accordingly He sent Elijah to Ahab to announce the nature and duration of His scourge. It is to be duly noted that the prophet came with his awe inspiring message not to the people, but to the king himself—the responsible head, the one who had it in his power to rectify what was wrong by banishing all idols from his dominion.

Elijah was now called upon to deliver a most unpalatable message unto the most powerful man in all Israel, but conscious that God was with him he flinched not from such a task. Suddenly confronting Ahab, Elijah at once made it evident that he was faced by one who had no fear of him, king though he were. His very first words informed Israel's degenerate monarch that he had to do with the living God. "As the LORD God of Israel liveth," was an outspoken confession of the prophet's faith, as it also directed attention to the One whom Ahab had forsaken. "Before whom I stand," that is, whose servant I am (cf. Deu 10:8; Luk 1:19). In whose name I approach you, in whose veracity and power I unquestioningly rely, in whose ineffable presence I am now conscious of standing, and whom I have prayed to and obtained answer.

"There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1Ki 17:1). Frightful prospect was that. From the expression, "the early and the latter rain" (Deu 11:14; Jer 5:24), we gather that, normally, Palestine experienced a dry season of several months duration. But though no rain fell then, very heavy dews descended at night which greatly refreshed vegetation. But for neither dew nor rain to fall, and that for a period of years, was a terrible judgment indeed. That land so rich and fertile as to be designated one which "flowed with milk and honey," would quickly be turned into one of drought and barrenness, entailing famine, pestilence, and death. And when God withholds rain, none can create it. "Are there any among the vanities [false gods] of the Gentiles that can cause rain?" (Jer 14:22)—how that reveals the utter impotency of idols and the madness of those who render them homage.

The exacting ordeal facing Elijah in confronting Ahab and delivering such a message called for no ordinary moral strength. This will be the more evident if we direct attention to a detail which has quite escaped the commentators—one which is only apparent by a careful comparison of Scripture. Elijah told the king, "There shall be no dew nor rain these years," while in 1 Kings 18:1 the sequel says, "And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." On the other hand, Christ declared, "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land" (Luk 4:25). How, then, are we to explain those extra six months? In this way—there had already been a six months drought when Elijah visited Ahab. We can well imagine how furious the king would be when told that the terrible drought was to last another three years!

Yes, the unpleasant task before Elijah called for no ordinary resolution and boldness, and well may we inquire, What was the secret of his remarkable courage, how are we to account for his strength? Some of the Jewish rabbis have contended that he was an angel, but that cannot be for the New Testament expressly informs us that he was "a man subject to like passions as we are" (Jam 5:17). Yes he was, but "a man." Nevertheless, He trembled not in the presence of a monarch. Though a man, yet he had power to close heaven's windows and dry up earth's streams. But the question returns upon us, How are we to account for the full assurance with which he foretold the protracted drought, his confidence that all would be according to his word? How was it that one so weak in himself became mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds?

We suggest a threefold reason as to the secret of Elijah's strength. First, his praying. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (Jam 5:17). Let it be duly noted that the prophet did not begin his fervent supplications after his appearance before Ahab, but six months before! Here, then, lies the explanation of his assurance and boldness before the king. Prayer in private was the source of his power in public. He could stand unabashed in the presence of the wicked monarch because he had knelt in humility before God. But let it also be

carefully observed that the prophet had “prayed earnestly.” No formal and spiritless devotion was his that accomplished nothing, but whole hearted, fervent, and effectual.

Second, his knowledge of God. This is clearly intimated in his words to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth” (1Ki 17:1). JEHOVAH was to him a living reality. On all sides the open recognition of God had ceased. So far as outward appearances went there was not a soul in Israel who believed in His existence. But Elijah was not swayed by public opinion and practice. Why would he be, when he had within his own breast an experience which enabled him to say with Job, “I know that my redeemer liveth!” (Job 19:25). The infidelity and atheism of others cannot shake the faith of one who has apprehended God for himself. It is this which explains Elijah’s courage, as it did on a later occasion the uncompromising faithfulness of Daniel and his three fellow Hebrews. He who really knows God is strong (see Dan 11:32) and fears not man.

Third, his consciousness of the divine presence, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand” (1Ki 17:1). Elijah was not only assured of the reality of JEHOVAH’s existence, but he was conscious of being in His presence. Though appearing before the person of Ahab, the prophet knew he was in the presence of One infinitely greater than any earthly monarch, even Him before whom the highest angels bow in adoring worship. Gabriel himself could not make a grander avowal (Luk 1:19). Ah, my reader, such a blessed assurance as this lifts us above all fear. If the Almighty was with him, why should the prophet tremble before a worm of the earth!? “The LORD God of Israel liveth before whom I stand” (1Ki 17:1), clearly reveals the foundation on which his soul rested as he executed his unpleasant task.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN’S IMPOTENCY**

### *Introduction*

The title which we have selected for this series of articles may occasion a raising of the eyebrows on the part of some of our readers. That we should designate the spiritual helplessness of fallen man a “doctrine” is likely to cause surprise, for it is certainly not so regarded or denominated in most circles today. Yet perhaps this is hardly to be wondered at—didactic preaching has fallen into such general disuse that more than one important doctrine is no longer heard from the pulpits. If on the one hand, there is a deplorable lack of a clear and definite portrayal of the character of God, on the other, there is also a woeful absence of any lucid and comprehensive presentation of the teaching of Scripture concerning the nature and condition of man, and such failure at either point is fraught with the most disastrous consequences. It is therefore timely, yea, urgent, to take up this neglected subject.

It is most important that people should clearly understand and be made thoroughly aware of their spiritual impotency, for thus alone is a foundation laid for bringing them to see and feel their imperative need of divine grace for salvation. So long as sinners think they have it in their own power to deliver themselves from their death in trespasses and sins, they will never come to Christ that they might have life, for “The whole need not a physician: but they that are sick” (Luk 5:31). So long as people imagine they labour under no insuperable inability to comply with the call of the Gospel, they will never be conscious of their entire dependence upon Him alone who is able to work in them “all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power”

(2Th 1:11). So long as the creature is puffed up with a sense of his own ability to respond to God's requirements, he will never become a beggar at the footstool of divine mercy.

A careful perusal of what the Word of God has to say upon this subject leaves us in no doubt about the awful state of spiritual serfdom into which the fall has brought man. The depravity, the blindness, and deadness of all mankind in things of a spiritual nature are continually inculcated and emphatically insisted upon throughout the sacred Scriptures. Not only is the total inability of the natural man to obtain salvation by deeds of the law frequently asserted, but his utter helplessness in himself to comply with the terms of the Gospel is also strongly affirmed—not indirectly and occasionally, but expressly and continually. Both in the Old Testament and in the New, in the declarations of the prophets, of the Lord Christ, and of His apostles, the bondage of the natural man unto Satan is often depicted, and his complete impotency to turn unto God for deliverance is solemnly and unequivocally set forth. Ignorance or misconception on the matter is therefore inexcusable.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that this is a doctrine which is now but little understood and rarely insisted upon. Notwithstanding the clear and uniform testimony of the Scriptures thereon, the actual condition of man and his alienation from God, his sinful inability to return unto Him, is but feebly apprehended and seldom heard even in orthodox quarters. The fact is that the whole trend of modern thought is in the very opposite direction. For the past century, and increasingly so during the last few decades, the greatness of man—his dignity, his development and his achievements—have been the predominant theme of pulpit and press. The anti scriptural theory of evolution is a blank denial of the fall and its dire consequences, and even where the Darwinian hypothesis has not been accepted, its pernicious influences have been more or less experienced. Arminianism, with its postulate of the freedom of man's will unto good, has offered a fertile soil for the growth of this poisonous weed.

The evil effects from the promulgation of the evolutionary lie are far more widespread than most Christians realize. Such a philosophy (if such it is entitled to be called) has induced multitudes of people to suppose that their state is far different from, yea vastly superior to, the fearful diagnosis furnished in Holy Writ. Even the great majority of those who have not accepted without considerable reservation the idea that man is slowly but surely progressing have been encouraged to believe that their case is far better than it actually is. Consequently, when a servant of God boldly affirms that all the descendants of Adam are so completely enslaved by sin that they are utterly unable to take one step toward Christ for deliverance, he is looked upon as a doleful pessimist or crazy fanatic. To speak of the spiritual impotency of the natural man is, in our day, to talk in an unknown tongue.

Not only does the appalling ignorance of our generation cause the servant of God to labour under a heavy handicap when seeking to present the Scriptural account of man's total inability unto good, but he is also placed at a serious disadvantage by virtue of the marked distaste of this truth. The subject of his moral impotency is far from being a pleasing one to the natural man. He would be told that all he needs to do is exert himself, that salvation lies within the power of his will, that he is the determiner of his own destiny. Pride, with its strong dislike of being a debtor to the sovereign grace of God, rises up against it. Self esteem, with its rabid repugnance of anything which lays the creature in the dust, hotly resents what is so humiliating. Consequently, this truth is either openly rejected, or if professedly received, it is turned to an evil use.

Moreover, when it is insisted upon that man's bondage to sin is both voluntary and culpable, that the guilt for his inability to turn unto God or do anything pleasing in His sight lies at his own door, that his spiritual impotency consists in nothing but the depravity of his own heart and his

inveterate enmity against God, then the hatefulness of this doctrine will be speedily demonstrated. While men are allowed to think that their spiritual helplessness is involuntary rather than willful, innocent rather than criminal, something to be pitied rather than blamed, they may receive this truth with a measure of toleration—but let them be told that they themselves have forged the shackles which hold them in captivity to sin, that God deems them responsible for the corruption of their hearts, and that their incapability of being holy constitutes the very essence of their guilt—loud will be the outcries against such a flesh-withering truth.

But however repellent this truth may be to our hearers or readers, it must not be withheld from them. The minister of Christ is not sent forth to please or entertain his congregation, but to declare the counsel of God, and not merely those parts of it which may meet with their approval and acceptance, but “all the counsel of God” (Act 20:27). If he deliberately omits that which raises their ire, he betrays his trust. Once he starts whittling down his divinely given commission, there will be no end to the process, for one class will murmur against this portion of the truth and another against that. The servant of God has nothing to do with the response which is made to his preaching. His business is to deliver the Word of God in its unadulterated purity and leave the results to the One who has called him, and he may be assured at the outset that unless many in his congregation are seriously disturbed by his message, he has failed to deliver it in its clarity.

No, no matter how hotly this doctrine of man’s spiritual impotency be resented, both by the profane and the religious world, it must not be withheld through cowardice. Christ did not. Our supreme Exemplar announced this truth emphatically and constantly. To the Pharisees He said, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34). That is, your hearts are so vile, it is utterly impossible that anything holy should issue therefrom. You can no more change your own nature by any effort of will than a leper might heal himself by his own volition. “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (Joh 5:44). It is a moral impossibility—pride and humility are contraries. Those who seek to please self and those who sincerely aim at the approbation of God belong to two entirely different races.

On another occasion, the Lord Christ asked, “Why do ye not understand my speech?” to which He made answer, “even because ye cannot hear my word” (Joh 8:43). There is no mistaking His meaning here and no evading the force of His solemn utterance. The message of Christ was hateful to their worldly and wicked hearts, and could no more be acceptable to them than would wholesome food unto birds accustomed to feed on carrion. Man cannot act contrary to his nature—as well expect fire to burn downwards or water flow upwards. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:44), said the Saviour to the Jews. And what was their response? This, “Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a demon” (Joh 8:48).

Now if it is true that such is the case with the natural man that he can no more break the bonds which hold him in captivity to Satan than he could restore the dead to life, ought he not to be faithfully informed of his woeful condition? If it is true that he is so helpless and hopeless in himself, that he cannot turn from sin unto holiness, that he cannot please God, that he cannot take one step toward Christ for salvation, is it not the part of kindness to make him acquainted with his spiritual impotency? Does he not need his dreams of self—sufficiency shattered? Shouldn’t we expose the delusion that he is lord of himself? Yea, is it not positively cruel to leave him alone in his complacency and make no efforts to bring him face to face with the desperateness of his depravity? Surely anyone with a vestige of charity in his heart will have no difficulty in answering such questions.

It is far from a pleasant task for a physician to tell an unsuspecting patient that his or her heart is organically diseased or to announce unto a young person engaged in strenuous activities that his lungs are in such a condition he is totally unfit for violent exertions. Nevertheless, it is his bounden duty to break such news to him. Now if this principle holds good in connection with our moral bodies, how much more so with regard to our never dying spirits! True, there are some doctors who persuade themselves that there are times when it is expedient for them to withhold such information from their patients, but a true physician of souls is never justified in concealing the more distasteful aspect of the truth from those who are under his care. If he is to be free from their blood, then he must unsparingly expose the plague of their hearts.

The fact of fallen man's moral inability is indissolubly bound up with the doctrine of his total depravity, and any denial of the one is a repudiation of the other, as any attempt to modify the former is to vitiate the latter. In like manner, the fact of the natural man's impotency to deliver himself from the bondage of sin is inseparably connected with the truth of regeneration, for unless we are without strength in ourselves, what need is there for God to work a miracle of grace in us? It is, then, the reality of the sinner's helplessness which provides the dark background necessary for the Gospel, and just in proportion as we are made sensible of our helplessness shall we really value the mercy proffered to us in the Gospel. Contrariwise, while we cherish the delusion that we have power to turn unto God at any time, just so long shall we continue procrastinating and thereby despise its gracious overtures.

From what has been pointed out above the reader may begin to perceive the great practical importance of the subject which is (D.V.) to be before us. "A sense of danger excites; a sense of security puts to sleep. A company of gamblers in the sixth story are told that the building is on fire. One of them answers, 'We have the key to the fire escape,' and all continue the game. Suddenly one exclaims, 'The key is lost.' All immediately spring to their feet and endeavour to escape" (William Shedd, 1820-1894). Just so long as the sinner believes—because of his erroneous notion of the freedom of his will—that he has the power to repent and believe at any moment, he will defer faith and repentance. Nay he will not so much as beg God to work these graces in him.

The first office of the preacher is (under God) to stain the pride of all human glory, to bring down the high looks of man, to make him aware of his sinful perversity, to make his hearer feel that he is unworthy of the least of all God's mercies. His business is to strip him of the rags of his self righteousness and to shatter his self sufficiency, to make him sensible of his utter dependence on the mere grace of God. He only who finds himself absolutely helpless will surrender himself to sovereign grace. He only who feels himself to be already sinking under the billows of a justly deserved condemnation will cry out, "Lord save me, I perish." Only he who has been brought to despair will place the crown of glory on the only Head entitled to wear it. Though it is a fact that God alone can make any man conscious of his impotency, yet He is pleased to use means in doing this, and that means is the truth—faithfully dispensed, effectually applied by the Spirit.

# THE HOLY SABBATH

## *9. Its Opposition*

We now turn to the least pleasant part of our subject and contemplate the attacks which have been made upon this divine ordinance. It has been fiercely assailed both in doctrine and in practice, and this by the professed friends of the Lord as well as by His open enemies. Yet this should not surprise us, for since the carnal mind is enmity against God, that enmity ever manifests itself against whatever is of His special ordering—and the more so in proportion as His honour and glory are bound up with any particular appointment. It is at just such a point that the hostility of Satan rages most furiously, seeking with all his might and arts to stir up his subjects to overthrow the same, knowing full well that if that can be accomplished his own evil cause will be greatly furthered and the kingdom of darkness more firmly established in the world.

Just as in carnal warfare there are certain strategic centers—“key positions”—on which the security of the whole “line” depends, and just as such a strategic center is made the “military objective” by the opposing army, who are determined to capture it at all costs, so it is in connection with the great forces of good and evil. There are certain bulwarks (Isa 48:12-13) which are of vital importance, the maintaining of which is essential for the furtherance of true piety, for once they be captured the way is wide open for the hordes of wickedness to wreak their evil will. Such a “bulwark” is the Sabbath—on the strict observance of it depends the well being of church and state alike. To keep the Sabbath holy secures the blessing of the Most High, but the desecration thereof most assuredly calls down His curse upon a land and people.

After what has been pointed out in previous articles, there is little need now for us to enter upon a lengthy proof that the Holy Sabbath is one of the principal bulwarks of Zion. Or that it constitutes one of the most vital of all “strategic centers” in the defenses of truth and godliness, spirituality and morality. It is like a mighty fortress which guards the entrance to a pass that gives access to a vast industrial center. Once that fortress be captured, the millions of people living behind it in the cities are then at the mercy of the advancing foe. And just as in a military campaign the attacking general makes the demolition of that fortress his main aim, concentrating the strength of his forces against it, so it is in connection with Satan’s fight against the kingdom of God upon earth. He knows full well that the overthrow of the Sabbath would mean for him a “major victory.”

To employ a rather different figure. The blessings which God has promised unto men—blessings both temporal and spiritual—flow most freely along the particular channels which He has Himself appointed. Contrariwise, if those channels be forsaken, then the blessings will also be forfeited. Now since the Sabbath is the day which the Lord has set apart for the communication of special blessing, then it is obvious that those blessings will be enjoyed in greatest measure by those who are the sincerest and strictest in its sacred observance. This is a fact which is capable of the clearest verification. Organized Christianity has been here for nineteen hundred years, and during that lengthy span it has experienced many vicissitudes, passing through periods of prosperity on the one hand and of adversity on the other, of light and purity and darkness and impurity, of spiritual energy and of spiritual torpor.

Now it can be plainly shown from the chronicles of history that there has been to a very striking degree an unmistakable correspondence in those periods between the observance of Sabbath sanctity and the spiritual prosperity of the churches on the one hand and the neglect of the Sabbath’s sanctity and spiritual declension of the churches on the other. In this we may also

see parallels with the varied experiences of the nation of Israel in Old Testament times—compare our article in the May, 1939 issue. While it is true that only fragments have survived the flight of time of what was recorded in the first two or three centuries A.D., yet sufficient is extant to show that in those centuries the Lord's Day was faithfully kept by His people in caves and catacombs, surrounded by every form of peril—as witness the testimonies of Eusebius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, etc. How far, then, was the state of the church a flourishing one in those early days?

In seeking the answer to our last question, it must be distinctly borne in mind that the prosperity of Christianity is not to be gauged by the esteem in which it is held by the world in general. Very much to the contrary. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (Joh 15:19). Unless that divine pronouncement be held steadily before us we are certain to arrive at an entirely wrong answer to our inquiry. The world's hatred and opposition and not the world's love and co operation are the surest index to the spiritual prosperity of Christianity. What the early Christians suffered at the hands of Nero and others of the Roman emperors which followed him, is too well-known to need any description of ours. Thousands of Christ's followers sealed their testimony with their blood, yet despite the fierce persecution encountered, the Gospel continued to be diffused far and wide.

During the course of time, Satan has resorted to a great variety of tactics in his efforts to stamp out the observance of the Sabbath, employing widely different measures and methods in his determination to choke this channel of divine blessing. He employed a strange but effective instrument in his first onslaught. The fidelity and courage of the first martyrs evoked the deep esteem of the suffering but prospering church. But alas—such is man—the praising of the martyrs soon took the place of the praising of Him who had sustained them, and ere long the places where they had suffered and the graves in which their mangled remains had been interred began to be regarded with superstitious veneration. It was not long until the days on which they had been martyred were regarded as comparatively sacred for their memories and were set apart as holy festivals hallowed by their death.

Not only were the virtues of the martyrs eulogized, but gradually it became popular to offer up prayers—at first for the souls of these Christians heroes, and later to the martyrs themselves as to a species of subordinate mediators. The efforts of the enemy proved only too successful. The calendar of the church soon became so filled with these "saints" days that the solitary dignity of the Lord's Day was crowded out and thus the channel of divine blessing was choked. That holy veneration which had been accorded unto the Sabbath alone was now divided and extended to a multitude of human appointments, and even before the power of pagan Rome to suppress the public observance of the Christian Sabbath had passed away, its sole sanctity had disappeared before a legion of these spurious "holy days."

Constantine framed statutes requiring the inhabitants of cities to suspend their ordinary business and mechanics to abstain from their common labour on the Sabbath, and closed the courts of justice and all other public offices on that day—clear proof of how the early church had been desirous to observe it. But the laws drawn up by this strange character who espoused Christianity introduced a most pernicious element—the Sabbath and the "holy festivals" of human invention were placed on the same level. The sequel may easily be imagined. Those other "days" not being of divine authority quickly degraded the sanctity of the Lord's Day from its sole supremacy over the consciences of the worshippers. An attempt to raise any human innovation in matters of religion to an equality with what is of divine institution inevitably results in the lowering of the divine and in the elevation of the human above the divine.

What the Scriptures designate as “will worship” (Col 2:23) is false worship, devised by the depraved heart of man to minister to his corrupt inclinations—under the pretence of exalted piety. Not only is this “will worship” a false one, but in proportion as it flourishes, true worship is defiled. From the days of Constantine onwards, the progress of error and departure from the truth went on with ever accelerating pace and power, until in a short time the whole year was overrun with saints’ days and festivals and the Lord’s Day was entirely set aside, or where it was still professedly regarded was degraded into one of recreation, amusement, and festivities, of such kinds and degrees of debasement to be too sinful and shameful to describe.

It is needless to inquire whether or not the churches flourished spiritually during that time, for God cannot be mocked with impunity. The fourth and fifth centuries A.D. witnessed a sad lowering of Christian standards. The law was no longer faithfully enforced, the Gospel was grievously corrupted, and worship became more and more paganized. It was not long ere a faithless Christendom was made to reap what it had sown, for the judgments of God ever fall upon the ecclesiastical sphere before they reach the civil (see 1 Peter 4:17). Where the truth is rejected, professors are given up by God to believe a lie. The setting up of saints’ days and the degradation of the Lord’s Day paved the way for the rise of the great anti Christian power. The Roman Catholic apostasy was both the fully-developed offshoot of the evils to which we have alluded, as she was also suffered by God to assume dominion as a mark of His displeasure upon an adulterous generation.

The growth and domination of the Papacy supplied a vivid demonstration of the spiritual adversity and desolation which had overtaken Christendom, and rightly have the centuries which followed been designated “the Dark Ages.” No longer was the Word of God preached to the people, no longer was the Sabbath day kept holy, no longer was the simplicity of Christian worship observed. Priestcraft poisoned every spring and the water of life was no longer obtainable. And where was the true church of Christ to be found during this dark season—for even then God left not Himself without true witnesses on earth. The answer is, among the Vaudois valleys of the Alps—among that poor and despised people known as the Waldensians. No sooner did the degenerate system of Popery rise to power than the humble dwellers of the Piedmont become distinguished for their firm adherence to the standards of primitive Christianity, refusing to adopt any other rule of faith than the written Word of God, and exemplifying its precepts in their daily walk to an extent that few have done since.

Those possessing any acquaintance of church history are familiar with the tragic but glorious sequel. The rage of Rome knew no bounds against this people who witnessed so faithfully and valorously for Christ, many of whom were given the great honour of suffering severely even unto death rather than yield to the demands of the Mother of Harlots. Even though most of their writings perished in the devastating persecution which they experienced, by which Rome strove might and main to exterminate them root and branch, yet sufficient have survived to furnish proof that the Waldensian Christians were characterized by Sabbath observance. In “The Noble Lesson,” of date about 1100, there is not only a clear avowal of the binding nature of the Moral Law—and consequently of the fourth commandment—but an enunciation of an important principle which shows their conception of the relation of the law to the Gospel: “Christ did not change it that it should be abrogated, but renewed it that it might be better kept.”

In the Confession of Faith of the same church, the feasts and vigils of saints are denounced as “an unspeakable abomination.” In an “Exposition of the Commandments” the following occurs, “They that will keep and observe the Sabbath of Christians, that is to say, will sanctify the day of the Lord, must be careful of four things. The first is to cease from all earthly and worldly labours.

The second, not to sin. The third, not to be idle in regard to good works, and fourth, to do those things which are for the good of the soul.” And in another Confession, drawn up at a later period, the following article appears, “That on Sundays we ought to cease from our worldly labours, through zeal for God, and love towards our servants, and that we may apply ourselves to hearing the Word of God.” These notices are enough to prove that the Waldensian church was definitely distinguished by its sacred observance of the Lord’s Day.

And what was the religious prosperity of Christianity in the Alps in those perilous times? Most pertinent is such an inquiry after what we have affirmed above. But again we must be careful not to employ a wrong standard of measurement, as we are so liable to do in a day when it is very common to estimate values wrongly. That prosperity is not to be looked for in numbers, in social prestige, or in anything which is highly-esteemed among men, but rather in those spiritual fruits which are to the praise of God, because produced by the gracious operations of His Spirit. If to endure persecution as good soldiers of Jesus Christ without murmuring, if to suffer the acutest afflictions without wavering, if to experience continual persecution with an invincible patience and victorious faith be the marks of spiritual well-being, then the Waldensian church certainly flourished spiritually.

“If to continue steadfast through a long agony of centuries, glorifying God in the midst of the furnace of persecution, even when it was heated seven times, maintaining still imperishable life and heavenly hope triumphant over all, be religious prosperity, that church in the wilderness was marvelously prosperous. And if, in the midst of all its fiery trials, to strive to its power, and beyond its power, to act as a missionary church, not only upholding its own testimony to the truth, but striving to diffuse around it that priceless blessing, thus both continuing and extending true Christianity in spite of all the deadly efforts of anti Christian Rome, be religious prosperity, the faithful and zealous Waldensian church was gloriously prosperous.

“The teaching of that church pervaded the south of France and became instrumental there in winning many souls to Christ. Its living truths ran along the Rhine, communicating spiritual life to numbers and preparing a way for future Gospel progress. Bohemia caught some rays of the sacred light, which in later age became the day spring of heavenly brightness to suffering martyrs. The distant British Isles obtained some powerful life germs, destined in due time to put forth a mighty and growing energy, not only for the protection of the suffering of the Waldenses themselves, but for the diffusion of Gospel truth throughout the world. Such was the religious prosperity of the Bible-loving and Lord’s Day-keeping Waldensian church. And no true Christian will deny that it was a kind and measure of prosperity which God alone could have given and the world could not take away—the full amount and value of which only the day to come will reveal” (William Maxwell Hetherington [1803-1865], to whom we are indebted for the above quotations).

## **FAITH TO WORK MIRACLES**

During the last century there have been two cardinal errors made concerning much that is contained in the Gospels—errors which have prevailed extensively among professing Christians and which have wrought great havoc. Each of those errors concern that interpretation and application of the contents of the four evangelists as to what does and does not pertain to the Lord’s people today. The first of these errors was a dispensational one. The view was falsely taken that because our Lord’s ministry was confined to Palestine, while the temple still stood in

Jerusalem, it was therefore exclusively “Jewish” in its character, and that the saints of our era must turn only to the epistles of the apostle to the Gentiles for their marching orders. Such an error is refuted by the opening verses of Hebrews (where the ministry of Christ is contrasted from that of the prophets) and by the fact that the great division of time between B.C. and A.D. is dated from the birth of Christ, and not from His death or even His ascension.

The second error is a practical one. Here the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. In the former case, an insidious and insistent attempt was made to deprive the saints of a valuable part of their legitimate heritage, taking from them needed precepts and precious promises under the pretext they were the sole property of the Jews. But in the latter case, which is now more fully to engage our attention, promises which were made to a particular class have been allocated universally, promises which belonged only to the apostles and the primitive Christians have been wrongly applied to all believers in general. The result has been that false expectations were engendered, vain hopes raised, wild fanaticism encouraged—and those who have come into contact with this perversion of the truth have seen what tragic effects followed—thousands making complete shipwreck of the faith.

No doubt it will seem to some of our friends that we are now treading on delicate ground, for to assure them that some of the promises made by Christ to His disciples, promises which numbers of our readers may have been taught are the legitimate grounds on which to rest their faith, do not—in their prime sense—belong to them at all, must prove disquieting and disappointing. We shall, therefore, proceed cautiously and slowly, and ask them to weigh with extra diligence what follows. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mar 16:17-18). Now those are the words of the Lord Jesus, but may we appropriate them today and expect a literal fulfillment of the same? There are those who answer with an emphatic Yes, though we very much doubt if many regular readers of these pages would do so.

Now the verses just quoted respect the miracles which attended the preaching of the Gospel in the early days of this Christian dispensation, and it is to be duly noted that those miracles resulted from the exercise of faith. This we think will be so evident to our readers as to occasion no difficulty. But there are other passages in the Gospels dealing with the same subject—similar promises from the lips of the Saviour which may not appear so simple—and it is to them that we now turn. “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). This same promise, slightly varied, is found again in, “Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mar 11:24). How often has this promise been appropriated by Christians and earnestly pleaded before God, only to meet with no response. Such have attributed this lack of response to the failure of their faith (or been told that is the cause), instead of perceiving they were resting their faith on an unwarrantable foundation.

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). Our first concern should be to ascertain to whom those words were first addressed and the circumstance which occasioned them—considerations that are usually of first importance as aids to a true application of a verse, for if the context is ignored mistakes are sure to follow. The verses immediately preceding record our Lord’s cursing of the fig tree and the effect this had upon those attending Him. Verse 20 says, “When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!” Mark tells us, “And Peter [the spokesman of the apostles] calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst

is withered away” (Mar 11:22). Then it was that Christ replied, “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:21-22).

It must be borne in mind that at an earlier date Christ had appointed twelve of His disciples to preach the Gospel and to perform miracles in confirmation of their commission. “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness” (Mat 10:1)—those miraculous powers were primarily what Paul referred to when he spoke of, “The signs of an apostle were wrought among you” (2Co 12:12). Luke tells us that, “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither he himself would come” (Luk 10:1), bidding them “Heal the sick” (Luk 10:9). The same duly returned and declared, “Even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Luk 10:17). Thus, it is quite clear that the promise of Matthew 21:22 was made to those who were in possession of miraculous powers and was designed for their personal encouragement.

Before proceeding further, let it be pointed out that what we are advancing in this article is no novelty of our own devising, but rather a line of interpretation (alas, unknown to many in this superficial age) given out by many eminent servants of God in the past. For example, in his notes on Matthew 21:21-22, Thomas Scott wrote, “When Jesus observed the surprise of the disciples He again showed them the energy of faith, with a special reference to the power of working miracles in His name. Whenever a proper occasion offered of performing a miracle in support of their doctrine, and they went about it relying on His power and not doubting His concurrence, they would not only be enabled to perform as wonderful works as that of withering the barren fig tree, but even the Mount of Olives, which they were then passing, might, at their word be removed and cast into the sea! That is, nothing that they undertook would be impossible for them.” So also Matthew Henry said on Mark 11:22-23, “This is to be applied first to that faith of miracles which the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel were endowed with, who did wonders in things natural.”

Let us next inquire as to the extent of this promise, “All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Though this language be indefinite and unqualified, yet we are not warranted in drawing the conclusion that it is to be taken without any limitation. From the immediate context it is quite clear that this promise had sole respect unto the working of miracles. Christ’s object was to assure His apostles that if they prayed in faith for any supernatural gift or power in particular, that that gift or power would be granted to them. But we have no ground for believing that if those apostles prayed for something different, no matter how firm their expectation, that they would receive the same. They were not justified in extending the terms of the promise any further than was warranted by the obvious design of their Master on that special occasion.

Though the twelve had been endowed with supernatural powers, yet had they prayed for the bestowment on themselves of any temporal or spiritual blessing, there was nothing whatever in this particular promise which guaranteed an answer to any such request. Like we, the apostles and the primitive Christians were subject to poverty, disease, and all the common trials and afflictions of this present life. We have no reason to doubt that they—for they were men subject to like infirmities as we are—prayed for their removal or mitigation, yet we know from other Scriptures that their prayers respecting these things were not always granted. This at once shows us the promise of Matthew 21:22 was not a universal one, for in that case they might have sought any

temporal favours with the same faith and assurance of being heard as when they prayed that miracles should be wrought by their hands.

But let us now take note of the proviso which our Lord laid down, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." The same stipulation is found again in the parallel passage, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mar 11:24). This promise made by Christ with respect to the working of miracles was thus conditioned upon the exercise of a certain kind of faith. If those unto whom it was made really acted out the requisite faith, then their faith absolutely secured the fulfillment of the promise. On the other hand, if they failed to put forth the faith specified, then their request was not granted. Like most of the promises in Scripture, this also was a conditional one.

Matthew 17 furnishes us with an illustration of the apostles being unable to perform a desired miracle because of their failure to meet the proviso attached to the promise we are here considering. There we read of a certain man coming to Christ on behalf of his sorely vexed son, begging the Saviour to have mercy on him, and saying, "I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him" (Mat 17:16). After the Lord had healed the demon possessed youth, His disciples asked why they had been unable to perform this miracle. His answer is instructive, for it definitely confirms what we have said above, "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Mat 17:20).

We must next inquire wherein did this faith to work miracles differ from any other kind of faith? The answer is—It rested on an entirely different foundation. In the first place, it could only be exercised by those who had been specially endowed by supernatural power to work miracles, which pertained alone to Christ's servants at the beginning of this Christian era. And in the second place, such faith had to rely implicitly upon the specific promises which Christ had made unto such, namely, that upon their counting on His assistance to enable them thereto, He would infallibly make good His word respecting the same. The same thing may be seen, as pointed out in an earlier paragraph, in the promises recorded in Mark 16:17-18. Such were quite distinct from that faith which secures eternal life, resting upon quite another sort of promise.

In proof of what has last been said we refer to Acts 3. There we read of the beggar who had been lame from his birth asking alms of the apostles as they were about to enter the temple. To him Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Act 3:6, and cf. "in my name" in Mar 16:17). Later, in explaining to the wondering bystanders what had happened, Peter, after charging them with delivering up the Lord Jesus to Pilate, declared that God glorified His Son adding, "and his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong" (Act 3:16). Peter, then, had definitely acted faith upon such promises as had been given to the apostles in Matthew 21:21-22, and Mark 16:17-18, etc.

Saving faith consists of the heart's appropriation of the Gospel. It is laying hold of Christ Himself as He is offered therein to poor sinners. It is trusting in the mercy of God in the Redeemer. But the faith to perform miracles could only be effectually exercised by those to whom special promises for the working of such had been given. Christ had endowed the apostles with supernatural powers and had given assurance that He would assist them in the bringing of wondrous signs to pass for the glory of His name and the extension of His kingdom. And that promise of His was to be the ground of their faith. Thus, their faith had as definite and sure ground to rest upon as ours today in connection with eternal life. Nevertheless the former was

vastly inferior to the latter. Judas had the one, but not the other. Hence Paul declares that it was possible in those days to have faith so as to “remove mountains” and yet be destitute of a holy love (1Co 13:2).

After all that has been pointed out above, it should be obvious that Christians at this day are quite unwarranted in applying such a promise to themselves in any case they feel inclined, and that ministers of the Gospel are seriously misleading their hearers when they say to them, “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Mat 21:22). We are fully aware that some godly but misguided preachers have so misapplied this text, and that some devout believers have taken this promise for themselves. Yet this is no proof that either of them were right in so doing. We have personally attended more than one “Faith healing service” where such a promise was “claimed” by the one in charge and have witnessed the pathetic disappointment of the sick hobbling away on their crutches at the close. How many sober minded people were led into open infidelity by such a fiasco only the day will reveal. Perhaps some of our readers are beginning to better grasp our meaning when we say, from time to time, Many who fail to understand the sense of a verse are frequently misled by the sound of it.

(Continued in the April issue).



# April

## PEACE

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (Joh 14:27). Having sought to show last month what the peace of Christ consisted of—namely, an unshakeable confidence in the divine providence, an unchanging trust in God, and an unparalleled meekness—let us now endeavour to point out the causes of the same, or perhaps it would be better to say, the springs from which it proceeds, for the law of cause and effect obtains and operates just as truly in connection with His peace as it does with ours.

First, His implicit obedience to God. Speaking by the Spirit of prophecy we find the Messiah declaring, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:7-8). In Deuteronomy 10:2, JEHOVAH said unto Moses, “I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.” The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed were deposited for safekeeping in the holy ark, and here (Psa 40), we behold the blessed Antitype—the law of God enshrined in the Messiah’s affections—in consequence of which He perfectly and perpetually kept all the requirements of that law in thought and word and deed. Therefore could the Lord Jesus affirm, “I do always those things that please him” (Joh 8:29), and nothing is more pleasing to God than a hearty compliance with His will.

That peace is both the product and reward of obedience is clear from many passages. “Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psa 119:165). All who live in this world are born unto trouble (Job 5:7), much more so must the godly expect to encounter difficulties and conflicts (Psa 34:19). To the carnal eye no condition seems more undesirable and miserable than the state of those who serve God, yet no matter what their outward lot, peace dwells within, for “The work of righteousness shall be peace” (Isa 32:17). But the proportion in which that peace is enjoyed is determined by the measure of our love for and compliance with the divine law, for Wisdom’s ways are “ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). Consequently, since the Lord Jesus had a fervent and unabated love for that law and never forsook Wisdom’s paths, perfect peace ever possessed His soul.

Second His absolute surrender to the sovereignty of God. Of the wicked it is said, “The way of peace have they not known” (Rom 3:17). And why is this? Because they are in revolt against God. The only true resting place is for our wills to be lost in God’s, to meekly submit to His sovereign dispensations, to thankfully receive from His hand whatever enters our lives. Uniquely was that the case with the Lord Jesus. When favoured Capernaum despised His gracious overtures, instead of being riled thereby, He exclaimed, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:26). He had placed Himself unreservedly under the government of God, consequently He accepted all afflictions as coming from His hand, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). When His very soul was wrung with the most

acute anguish, so far from a word of complaint escaping His lips, He declared, “Father...not my will, but thine be done” (Luk 22:42). When enduring the sufferings of the cross—tormented by man and experiencing the wrath of God—He meekly “bowed his head” (see Joh 19:30), praying for His enemies, committing His spirit into the hands of the Father.

Third, His unclouded fellowship with the Father. Dwelling continually in the secret place of the Most High, He abode perpetually under the shadow of the Almighty. JEHOVAH was the portion of His inheritance, and therefore the lines fell unto Him “in pleasant places,” setting the Lord always before Him. He knew He should not be moved (Psa 16:5 8). Enjoying unbroken communion with God, His heart ever experienced perfect peace. “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father [sustained by communing with Him]: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (Joh 6:57). “I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me...he that sent me is with me” (Joh 8:16, 29). He ever had the blissful consciousness of the Father’s presence, “the Father is with me” (Joh 16:32).

Fourth, His unshaken confidence in the glory awaiting Him. “Let us run with patience [fortitude] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Heb 12:1-2). The man Christ Jesus lived in the assurance of an unseen future. He looked away from the things of time and sense, above the shows and delusions of this world, beyond its trials and sorrows, and set His affection on things in heaven. The prospect of a future, yet certain joy, enabled Him to run His race with patience, and therefore in the immediate prospect of death He could say, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope....thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:9, 11).

“My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (Joh 14:27). There is no other peace like it, though the unregenerate often mistake the sleep of death, a drugged conscience, worldly prosperity, the enjoyment of temporal comforts, for the same. The fact is that none but those who are born of God can understand or enter into this blessed truth. The peace which the world gives is a false one, it is continued by an uncertain tenure, and at the last takes away its gift, leaving its deluded votaries to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. But the Lord Jesus gives what is truly good, solid, and lasting, “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Job 34:29).

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *14. The Law and Love—Matthew 5:43-48*

Strictly speaking the contents of the last six verses of Matthew 5 contain a continuation of the same subject dealt with in the section immediately preceding them (Mat 5:38 42). There, we saw our Lord taking up the important matter of the law and retaliation. Here, He deals with the same theme, though from a different angle. There, He treated more especially with the negative side, declaring what the subjects of His kingdom must not do when they are provoked by personal affronts and private injuries—they are not to resist evil. But here, He takes up the positive aspect, stating what His followers must do unto those who hate and persecute them, namely, return good for evil, love for hatred. So far from being overcome with evil, the Christian is to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:20).

It will therefore be seen that in this concluding section of His exposition of the Moral Law, our Lord reached the climax in His showing how far the holiness required of His subjects exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. As Christ had taken up one commandment after another, He had made clear the vast difference which separated the one from the other. They had systematically distorted each precept that concerned man's relations with his fellows—lowering the divine standard and narrowing its scope, so as to comport with the depraved inclinations of their followers. Count after count the Saviour had preferred against them—over against which He had set the elevated and inexorable spirituality of God's requirements. The contrast is radical and revolutionary. It is the contrast between error and truth, darkness and light, corruption and holiness.

First, Christ had exposed their perversion of the divine statute, "Thou shalt not kill," and had revealed how far beyond their representations this requirement extended (Mat 5:21-26). Second, He had condemned their unwarrantable whittling down of the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and had shown it reached to the very thoughts and intents of the heart (Mat 5:27-32). Third, He had rebuked their wicked tampering with the injunction, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (Exo 20:7), and had affirmed that all unnecessary oaths of whatsoever kind were thereby prohibited (Mat 5:33-37). Fourth, He had shown how they had corrupted the magisterial rule of "an eye for an eye" (Mat 5:38-42). And finally, He dealt with their vile corruption of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mat 5:43-48).

Last month, we intimated that the commentators are all at sea in their understanding of Christ's, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies" (Mat 5:44). They failed to see that His purpose was to reinforce the requirements of the Moral Law. The "Moral Law" we say, not merely the Mosaic law, but that which God originally implanted in man's very nature, to be the rule of his being. The requirements of that original Moral Law (renewed at Sinai), are summed up in two things—first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mat 22:37)—that is, thou shalt esteem and venerate Him supremely, delight thyself in His excellency superlatively, honour and glorify Him constantly.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mat 22:39). Here are three things—first, the duty required, "Thou shalt love." Second, the ground or reason of it, because he is "thy neighbour"—that is, your fellow man, of the same order and blood as yourself. Third, the standard by which love to our neighbour is to be regulated—"as thyself," which defines both its nature and its measure. Such a requirement presupposes that we have a right temper of mind—an upright, impartial, benevolent temper, even to perfection, without the least tincture of anything to the contrary. This is self evident, for without such love we shall not, we cannot, love our neighbour in a true light, nor think of, nor judge of, nor feel toward him exactly as we ought. A wrong temper, a selfish, censorious, bitter spirit will inevitably give a wrong turn to all our thoughts and feelings unto him.

What is it to love our neighbour as ourself? Our love to ourself is unfeigned, fervent, active, habitual and permanent—so ought to be our love unto our neighbour. A regular self love respects all our interests, but especially our spiritual and eternal interests—so ought our love unto our neighbour. A regular self love prompts us to be concerned about our welfare tenderly, to seek it diligently and prudently, to rejoice in it heartily, and to be grieved for any calamities sincerely—so ought our love unto our neighbour prompt us to feel and conduct ourselves with regard to his welfare. Self love makes us take an unfeigned pleasure in promoting our welfare. We do not think

it hard to do so much for ourselves—we ought to have just the same genuine love to our neighbour, and thereby prove, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Act 20:35).

The kind of love which God requires us to have for our neighbour is therefore vastly superior to what is commonly called human compassion, for this is often found in the most lawless and wicked of men—it takes not its rise from regard to the divine authority nor respect for God’s image in our fellows, but springs merely from our animal constitution. The same may be said of what men term good nature. Just as some beasts are better tempered than others, so some humans are milder, gentler, humbler than their fellows, yet their amiability is not influenced by any consideration for the commands of God. The same may also be said of natural affection. Some of the most ungodly cherish warm affection to their wives and children, yea, make veritable idols of them—working and toiling day and night for them—to the utter neglect of God and their souls. Yet all this affection to their children does not prompt them to strive for their spiritual and eternal welfare. It is but natural fondness and not a holy love.

Now let it be clearly grasped that our Lord’s purpose in the last six verses of Matthew 5 was to purge this great and general commandment of the second table of the law—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Mat 5:43)—from the corrupt interpretations of the Jewish teachers and to restore it to its true and proper meaning. And as was His method in the previous sections, Christ here specifies first, the error of the rabbis, and then proceeds to enforce the rightful application of the divine precepts. Their error was twofold—first, the unwarrantable restricting of the term “neighbour” to those who were friendly disposed towards them. Second, the drawing from it of the false and wicked inference that it was lawful to hate their enemies. How closely modern Christendom approximates to degenerate Judaism in this respect. We must leave the reader to judge.

Having shown, again and again, what our Lord was engaged in doing throughout the whole of this part of His sermon (Mat 5:17-48), let us now point out His evident design in the same. To make this the more obvious, let the reader endeavour to place himself among Christ’s audience on this occasion and imagine that it was the first time you had ever heard such teaching, as you listened carefully to Christ’s emphatic and searching words, “I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:20). As you pondered His, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Mat 5:22), as you weighed His, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mat 5:28), what would be the effect produced upon you?

Face that question fairly and squarely, my reader. Had you stood on the slope of that mount and listened to Him who spoke as never men spoke—for He was God incarnate, the lawgiver Himself now interpreting and enforcing the demands of His holy, just, and spiritual law. As you honestly measured yourself by such pure and exalted requirements, what had been your reaction? Had you not been obliged to hang your head in shame? to acknowledge how far, far short you came of measuring up to such a heavenly standard? to own that when weighed in such a balance you were found woefully wanting, yea, that you were lighter than vanity? If you were honest with yourself, could you say anything less than that such a law utterly condemned you at every point, that before it you must confess yourself to be guilty, utterly undone, a lost sinner?

And then as you listened to the passage we have now reached and heard the Son of God affirm, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Mat 5:44), how had

you felt? Would you be filled with resentment and exclaim, Such a request is impracticable and absurd? Why, I instinctively, automatically, inevitably resent ill-treatment and feel ill will against those who hate and injure me. I cannot do otherwise. No efforts of mine can reverse the spontaneous impulses of my heart. I cannot change my own nature. Again we ask, would the attentive weighing of this demand, “Love your enemies,” evoke the angry retort, Such a requirement is preposterous, it is an impossibility, no man can obey it? If so, you would be but furnishing proof that “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).

Hearken now unto the final demand made by Christ in this connection, “Be ye therefore perfect,” and so that there should not be the slightest room for uncertainty, He added, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48). Do you say that this is too high for us to reach, that such a standard is unobtainable by flesh and blood? We answer, It is the standard which God Himself has set before us, before all men. It was God’s standard before the fall, and it is His standard still, for though man has lost his power to comply, God has not lost His right to require what is due Him. And why is it that man is no longer able to meet this righteous demand? Because his heart is corrupt—because he is totally depraved. But that in no wise excuses him, rather is it the very thing which renders him thoroughly guilty and his case inexcusable.

Cannot the reader now perceive clearly the design of Christ in pressing upon His hearers the exalted spirituality of the divine law and the inexorableness or immutability of its requirements? It was to shatter the vain hopes of His hearers, to slay their self righteousness. Of old it had been said, “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire” (Mal 3:2), which was then receiving its fulfillment, as the preceding verse (concerning John the Baptist) shows. If the heart of fallen man was so corrupt that he could not love his enemies, then he was in dire need of a new heart. If to be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect was wholly beyond him, and wholly contrary to him, then his need of being born again was self evident.

After all that has been before us, none should be surprised to learn that during the past fifty years there has been such a strong and widespread effort made to get rid of the flesh withering teaching of this part of our Lord’s ministry. Those professing to be the towers of orthodoxy and the most enlightened among Bible teachers have blatantly and dogmatically affirmed that, “The Sermon on the Mount is not for us,” that it is “Jewish,” that it pertains to a future dispensation, that it sets forth the righteousness which will obtain in “the millennial kingdom.” And this Satanic sop was eagerly devoured by multitudes of those who attended the “Second Coming of Christ” conferences, and were carried by them into many of the “churches,” their pastors being freely supplied with “dispensational” literature dealing with this fatal error. Slowly but surely this evil leaven has worked until a very considerable and influential section of what passes as orthodox Christianity has been poisoned by it.

The fundamental error of those men claiming to “rightly divide the word of truth” is their opposition to and repudiation of the law of God. Their insistence that it is solely Jewish, that the Gentiles were never under it, and that it is not now the believer’s Rule of Life. Never has the devil succeeded in palming off for the truth a more soul destroying lie than this. Where there is no exposition of the Moral Law and no pressing of its righteous demands—where there is no faithful turning of its holy and searching light upon the deceitful heart—there will be, there can be, no genuine conversions, for “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It is by the law alone we can learn the real nature of sin, the fearful extent of its ramifications, and the penalty passed

upon it. The law of God is hated by man—religious and irreligious alike—because it condemns him and demonstrates him to be in high revolt against its Giver.

Knowing full well the detestation of their hearers for the divine law, a large percentage of those who have occupied the pulpits during the past few decades have studiously banished it therefrom, displacing it with “studies in prophecy” and what they designate as “the Gospel of the grace of God.” But the “Gospel” preached by these blind leaders of the blind was “another Gospel” (Gal 1:6). Where there is no enforcing the requirements of the law, there can be no preaching of God’s Gospel, for so far from the latter being opposed to the former, it “establishes” the same (see Rom 3:31). Consequently, the “churches” became filled with spurious converts, who trampled the law of God beneath their feet. And this, more than anything else, accounts for the lawlessness which now obtains everywhere in church and state alike.

So far from the Gentiles never having received the law of God, the apostle to the Gentiles expressly declares, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). What could possibly be plainer? Even if the “every mouth” did not signify all without exception, it must at the very least mean all without distinction, and therefore would include Jew and Gentile alike. But as though to remove any uncertainty, it is added, “all the world,” that is, the entire number of the ungodly. However much the wicked may now murmur against God’s law, in the day of judgment every one of them shall be silent—convicted and confounded. Before the divine tribunal every sinner will be brought in guilty by the law, to his utter confusion and eternal undoing. However far they may have previously succeeded in an attempt at self extenuation or of vindicating themselves before their fellows, when they shall stand “before God” their own consciences will utterly condemn them.

Then how vitally important, how absolutely essential it is, that the law should be plainly and insistently enforced now. Nothing is more urgently needed today than discourses patterned after our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. It is the bounden duty of His servants to press upon their hearers the divine authority, the exalted spirituality, the inexorable demands of the Moral Law. Nothing is so calculated to expose the worthlessness of the empty profession of modern religionists. Let them be informed that nothing less than loving God with all their heart and strength, and to love their neighbours as themselves, is required of them, and that the slightest failure to render the same brings them in guilty, and thus exposes them to the certainty of everlasting woe—and either they will bow in self condemnation before the divine sentence or they will come out in their true colours and rail against it.

Then see to it, preachers, that you faithfully set forth the unchanging requirements of the thrice holy God. Spare no efforts in bringing your congregations to understand what is signified in loving God with all the heart, and all that is involved in loving our neighbours as ourselves. How otherwise shall they be brought to know their guilt? Unless they are made to feel how totally contrary to God is their depraved nature, how shall they discover their imperative need of being born again? True, such preaching will not increase your popularity, rather will it evoke opposition. But remember that the Saviour Himself was hounded to death not for proclaiming the Gospel, but for enforcing the law! Even though you be persecuted, yours will be the satisfaction of knowing your skirts are clear from the blood of your hearers.

# THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

## 4. *By the Brook*

“Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (Jam 5:17). Elijah is here brought before us as an example of what may be accomplished by the earnest prayers of one “righteous man” (Jam 5:16). Ah, my reader, mark well the descriptive adjective, for it is not every man, nor even every Christian, who obtains definite answers to his prayers—far from it. A “righteous man” is one who is right with God in a practical way. One whose conduct is pleasing in His sight, one who keeps his garments unspotted from the world, who is in separation from religious evil, for there is no evil on earth half so dishonouring and displeasing to God as religious evil (see Luk 10:12 15; Rev. 11:8). Such an one has the ear of heaven, for there is no moral barrier between his soul and a sin hating God. “Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:22).

“He prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (Jam 5:17). What a terrible petition to present before the Majesty on high! What incalculable privation and suffering the granting of such a request would entail! The fair land of Palestine would be turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, and its inhabitants would be wasted by a protracted famine with all its attendant horrors. Then was this prophet a cold and callous stoic, devoid of natural affection? No indeed, the Holy Spirit has taken care to tell us in this very verse that he was “a man subject to like passions as we are” (Jam 5:17) and that is mentioned immediately before the record of his fearful petition. And what does that description signify in such a connection? Why this—that though Elijah was endowed with tender sensibilities and warm regard for his fellow creatures, yet in his prayers he rose above all fleshly sentimentality.

Why was it Elijah prayed “that it might not rain?” (Jam 5:17). Not because he was impervious to human suffering, not because he took a fiendish delight in witnessing the misery of his neighbours, but because he put the glory of God before everything else, even before his own natural feelings. Recall what has been pointed out in an earlier article concerning the spiritual conditions that then obtained in Israel. Not only was there no longer any public recognition of God throughout the length and breadth of the land, but on every side He was openly insulted and defied by Baal worshippers. Daily the tide of evil rose higher and higher, until it had now swept practically everything before it. And Elijah was “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts” (1Ki 19:10) and longed to see His great name vindicated and His backslidden people restored. Thus it was the glory of God and true love for Israel which actuated his petition.

Here, then, is the outstanding mark of a “righteous man” whose prayers prevail with God—though one of tender sensibilities, yet he puts the honour of the Lord before every other consideration. And God has promised “them that honour me I will honour” (1Sa 2:30). Alas, how frequently those words are true of us, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (Jam 4:3). We “ask amiss” when natural feelings sway us, when carnal motives move us, when selfish considerations actuate us. But how different was it with Elijah. He was deeply stirred by the horrible indignities against his Master and longed to see Him given His rightful place again in Israel. “And it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months.” The prophet failed not of his object. God never refuses to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and clearly it was on that ground Elijah had supplicated Him.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). It was there at that blessed throne that Elijah obtained the strength which he so surely needed at that time. Not only was he required to keep his own skirts clear from the evil all around him, but he was called upon to exercise a holy influence upon others, by acting for God in a degenerate age, to make a serious effort to bring back the people to the God of their fathers. How essential it was, then, that he should dwell much in the secret place of the Most High, that he should obtain that grace from Him which alone could fit him for his difficult and dangerous undertaking. Only thus could he be delivered from evil himself, and only thus could he hope to be instrumental in delivering others. Thereby equipped for the conflict, he entered upon his path of service endowed with divine power.

Conscious of the Lord’s approbation, assured of the answer to his petition, sensible that the Almighty was with him, Elijah boldly confronted the wicked Ahab and announced the divine judgment on his kingdom. But let us pause for a minute so that this weighty fact may sink into our minds, for it explains to us the more-than human courage displayed by the servants of God in every age. What was it that made Moses so bold before Pharaoh? What was it that enabled the young David to go forth and meet the mighty Goliath? What was it that gave Paul such strength to testify as he did before Agrippa? From whence did Luther obtain such resolution that he would continue his mission? In each case the answer is the same—supernatural strength was obtained from a supernatural Source. Only thus can we be energized to wrestle with the principalities and powers of evil.

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:29-31). But where had Elijah learned this all important lesson? Not in any seminary or Bible training college, for if there were such in that day they were like those of our own degenerate time—in the hands of the Lord’s enemies. Nor can the schools of orthodoxy impart such secrets. Even godly men cannot teach themselves this lesson, much less can they impart it to others. Ah, my reader, as it were at the “backside of the desert” (Exo 3:1) that the Lord appeared to and commissioned Moses, so it was in the solitude of Gilead that Elijah had communed with JEHOVAH and had been trained by Him for his arduous duties. There he had “waited” upon the Lord and there had he obtained “strength” for his task.

None but the living God can effectually say unto His servant, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). Thus granted the consciousness of the Lord’s presence, His servant goes forth, as “bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1), fearing no man, kept in perfect calm amid the most trying circumstances. It was in such a spirit that the Tishbite confronted Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand” (1Ki 17:1). But how little that apostate monarch knew of the secret exercises of the prophet’s soul ere he thus came forth to address his conscience! “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1Ki 17:1)—very striking and blessed is that. The prophet spoke with the utmost assurance and authority, for he was delivering God’s message—the servant identifying himself with his Master. Such should ever be the demeanour of the minister of Christ, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen” (Joh 3:11).

“And the word of the LORD came unto him” (1Ki 17:2). How blessed! yet this is not likely to be perceived unless we ponder the same in the light of the foregoing. From the preceding verse we learn that Elijah had faithfully discharged his commission, and here we find the Lord speaking

anew to His servant. Thus we regard the latter as a gracious reward of the former. This is ever the Lord's way, delighting to commune with those who delight to do His will. It is a profitable line of study to trace this expression throughout the Scriptures. God does not grant fresh revelations until there has been a compliance with those already received. We may see a case of this in the early life of Abraham. "The LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee...unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen 12:1), but instead, he went only half-way and settled in Haran (see Gen 11:31), and it was not until he left there and fully obeyed that the Lord again appeared to him (Gen 12:4 7).

"And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith" (1Ki 17:2-3). An important practical truth is hereby exemplified. God leads His servants step by step. Necessarily so, for the path which they are called to tread is that of faith, and faith is opposed to both sight and independence. It is not the Lord's way to reveal to us the whole course which is to be traversed, rather does He restrict His light to one step at a time, that we may be kept in continual dependence upon Him. This is a most salutary lesson, yet it is one that the flesh is far from relishing, especially in those who are naturally energetic and zealous. Before he left Gilead for Samaria to deliver his solemn message, the prophet would no doubt wonder what he should do as soon as it was delivered. But that was no concern of his, then—he was to obey the divine order and leave God to make known what he should do next.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Pro 3:5-6.) Ah, my reader, had Elijah then leaned unto his own understanding we may depend upon it that hiding himself by the brook Cherith is the last course he would have selected. Had he followed his instincts, yea had he done that which he considered most glorifying to God, would he not have embarked upon a preaching tour throughout the towns and villages of Samaria? Would he not have felt it was his bounden duty to do everything in his power calculated to awaken the slumbering conscience of the public, so that his subjects—horrified at the prevailing idolatry—would bring pressure to bear upon Ahab to put a stop to it? Yet that was the very thing God would not have him do. What then is reasoning or natural inclinations worth in connection with divine things? Nothing.

"And the word of the LORD came unto him" (1Ki 17:2). Note it is not said, "the will of the LORD was revealed to him" or "the mind of God was made known." We would particularly emphasize this detail, for it is a point on which there is no little confusion today. There are numbers who mystify themselves and others by a lot of pious talk about "obtaining the Lord's mind" or "discovering God's will" for them, which when carefully analyzed amounts to nothing better than a vague uncertainty or a personal impulse. God's "mind" or "will," my reader, is made known in His Word, and He never "wills" anything for us which to the slightest degree clashes with that heavenly Rule. Changing the emphasis, note, "the word of the LORD came unto him"—there was no need for him to go and search for it! (see Deu 30:11 14).

And what a "word" it was that came to Elijah, "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan" (1Ki 17:3). Verily God's thoughts and ways are indeed entirely different from ours. Yes, and He alone can "make known" (Psa 103:7) the same unto us. It is almost amusing to see how the commentators have quite wandered from the track here, for almost one and all of them explain the Lord's command as being given for the purpose of providing protection for His servant. As the death dealing drought continued, the perturbation of Ahab would increase more and more, and as he remembered the prophet's language that there should be neither dew nor rain but according to his word, his rage against him would know no bounds. Elijah, then, must be provided with a refuge if his life was to be spared.

Yet Ahab made no attempt to slay him when next they met (1Ki 18:17-20)! Should it be answered, That was because God's restraining hand was upon the king. We answer, Granted, but was not God able to restrain him all through the interval?

No, the reason for the Lord's order to His servant must be sought elsewhere, and surely that is not far to ascertain. Once it be recognized that next to the bestowments of His Word and the Holy Spirit to apply the same, the most valuable gifts He grants any people is the sending of His own qualified servants among them, and that the greatest possible calamity which can befall any land is God's withdrawal of those whom He appoints to minister unto the soul, and no uncertainty should remain. The drought on Ahab's kingdom was a divine scourge and in keeping therewith the Lord bade His prophet "get thee hence" (1Ki 17:3). The removal of the ministers of His truth is a sure sign of God's displeasure, a token that He is dealing in judgment with a people who have provoked Him to anger.

It should be pointed out that the Hebrew word for "hide" (1Ki 17:3) is an entirely different one from that which is found in Joshua 6:17-25 (Rahab's hiding of the spies) and in 1 Kings 18:4, 13. The word used in connection with Elijah might well be rendered, "turn thee eastward and absent thyself," as it is in Genesis 31:49. Of old the psalmist had asked, "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?" (Psa 74:1). And what was it that caused him to make this plaintive inquiry? what had happened to make him realize that the anger of God was burning against Israel? This—"They have cast fire into thy sanctuary....they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet" (Psa 74:7-9). It was the doing away with the public means of grace which was the sure sign of the divine displeasure.

Ah, my reader, little as it may be realized in our day, there is no surer and more solemn proof that God is hiding His face from a people or nation than for Him to deprive them of the inestimable blessing of those who faithfully minister His Holy Word to them, for as far as heavenly mercies excel earthly so much more dreadful are spiritual calamities than material ones. Through Moses the Lord declared, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (Deu 32:2). And now all dew and rain was to be withheld from Ahab's land, not only literally so, but spiritually so as well. Those who ministered His Word were removed from the scene of public action (cf. 1Ki 18:4).

If further proof of the Scripturalness of our interpretation of 1 Kings 17:3 be required, we refer the reader to, "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers" (Isa 30:20). What could be plainer than that? For the Lord to remove His teachers into a corner was the sorest loss His people could suffer, for here He tells them that His wrath shall be tempered with mercy, that though He gave them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction yet He would not again deprive them of those who ministered unto their souls. Finally, we would remind the reader of Christ's statement that there was "great famine" in the land in Elijah's time (Luk 4:9-5) and link up with the same, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it" (Amo 8:11-12).

# THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY

## *2. Its Reality*

The spiritual impotency of the natural man is no mere product of theological dyspepsia, nor is it a dismal dogma invented during the dark ages. No, it is a solemn fact—affirmed by Holy Writ, manifested throughout human history and confirmed in the conscious experience of every genuinely convicted soul. True, the moral powerlessness of the sinner is not proclaimed by the pulpit today, nor is it believed by professing Christians generally. True, also, when it is insisted upon that man is so completely the bondsman of sin he cannot move towards God, the vast majority will regard it as literally unreasonable and reject it with scorn. To tell those who deem themselves to be hale and hearty that they are without strength, strikes them as a preposterous postulate, quite unworthy of serious consideration.

When a servant of God does press this unwelcome truth upon his hearers, the fertile mind of unbelief promptly replies with one objection after another. If we are totally devoid of spiritual ability, then assuredly we must be aware of the fact—but so far from that being the case, says the skeptic, we are very sensible of our power to do that which is pleasing in God's sight—even though we perform it not, we could if we wanted to. Again, it is rejoined, were we so completely the captives of Satan as you declare, then we should not be free agents at all, and such a concept as that we will not allow for a moment. Again—if man has no power to do that which God requires, then obviously he would not be a responsible creature, for he could not justly be held accountable to do that which was beyond his powers to achieve.

From what has been pointed out above it will be seen that before any attempt is made to open up our subject, we must establish the fact of man's spiritual impotency and show that it is a solemn reality. Until we do this, it is useless to discuss the nature of that impotency, its seat, its extent, or its cause. And it is to the inspired Word of God alone that we shall make our appeal, for if the Scriptures of truth plainly teach this doctrine then we are on sure ground, and dare not reject its testimony thereto even though no one else on earth believed the same. If the divine Oracles affirm it, then none of the objections brought against it by the carnal mind can have any weight with us, though in due course we shall endeavour to show that these objections are as pointless as they are groundless.

In approaching more definitely the task now before us it should be pointed out that strictly speaking it is the subject of human depravity which we are going to write upon, yet to have so designated these articles would be rather misleading as we are going to confine ourselves to only one aspect of it. The spiritual impotency of the natural man forms a distinct and separate branch of his depravity. The state of evil into which the fall has plunged us is far more dreadful and its dire consequences far more wide reaching than is commonly supposed. The common idea is that though man be fallen yet he is not so badly damaged but that he may recover himself, providing he properly exercises his remaining strength or with due attention improves the help proffered him. But his case is vastly more serious than that.

“The three main elements involved in the consequences entailed by the sin of Adam upon his posterity are these. First, the guilt, or just penal responsibility of Adam's first sin or apostatising act, which is imputed or judicially charged upon his descendants, whereby every child is born into the world in a state of antenatal forfeiture or condemnation. Second, the entire depravity of our nature, involving a sinful innate disposition inevitably leading to actual transgression. Third, the entire inability of the soul to change its own nature, or to do anything spiritually good in

obedience to the divine law” (Archibald A. Hodge, 1823-1886). It is the third of these direful consequences of the Fall which is now to engage our attention.

Let us begin by considering some of the plain declarations of our Lord upon this solemn subject. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). Until a man be born again he remains in his natural, fallen, and depraved state, and so long as that is the case with him, it is utterly impossible for him to discern or perceive divine things. Sin has both darkened his understanding and destroyed his visive faculty. “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Pro 4:19). Though divine instruction be supplied them, though God has given them His Word in which the way to heaven is plainly marked out, yet they are incapable of profiting from the same. Moses represented them as “groping at noonday” (see Deu 28:29), and Job declares, “They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night” (Job 5:14). Jeremiah depicts them as walking in “slippery ways in the darkness” (Jer 23:12).

Now this darkness which envelopes the natural man is a moral one, having its seat in the soul. Our Saviour declared, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Mat 6:22-23). The heart is the same to the soul as the eye is to the body. As a sound eye lets in natural light, so a good heart lets in spiritual light, and as a blind eye shuts out natural light so an evil heart shuts out spiritual light. Accordingly we find the apostle expressly ascribing the darkness of the understanding to the blindness of the heart. He represents all men as “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18).

While sinners remain under the entire dominion of a wicked heart they are altogether blind to the spiritual excellence of the character, of the works, and of the ways of God. “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not” (Jer 5:21). The natural man is blind. This awful fact was affirmed again and again by our Lord, “They be blind leaders of the blind” (Mat 15:14). “Ye blind guides....Thou blind Pharisee” (Mat 23:24, 26). So, too, Paul, “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2Co 4:4). There is in the unregenerate mind an incompetence, an incapacity, an inability to understand the things of the Spirit, and the repeated miracle which Christ wrought in restoring sight to the naturally blind was designed to teach us our imperative need of the same divine power recovering to the soul our spiritual vision.

A question has been raised at this point as to whether this blindness of the natural man be partial or total, whether it be simply a defective vision or whether he has none at all. The answer is that the nature of his disease may best be defined as spiritual myopia or shortsightedness. He is able to behold clearly objects which are near by, but distant ones lie wholly beyond the range of his vision. In other words, the mind’s eye of the sinner is capable of perceiving natural things, but he has no ability to see spiritual things. Thus it is expressed in Holy Writ, the one who “lacketh these things” (2Pe 1:9), namely, the graces of faith, virtue, knowledge, etc., mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5 7, is “blind, and cannot see afar off” (2Pe 1:9), and therefore is he bidden to buy of Christ “eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev 3:18).

It was for this very purpose that the Son of God came into the world—to give “deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind” (Luk 4:18), and concerning those who are made the subjects of this miracle of grace it is said, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). This is the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise, “I am the light of the

world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Joh 8:12). God is light, and therefore those who are alienated from Him are in complete spiritual darkness. They see not the frightful danger to which they are exposed. Though they are led captive by Satan from day to day and year to year, they are totally unaware of his malignant influence over them. They are blind to the nature and tendency of their religious performances, failing to perceive that no matter how earnestly they engage in the same, they cannot be acceptable to God while their minds are enmity against Him. They are blind to the way and means of recovery.

The awful thing is that the natural man is quite blind to the blindness of his heart which is insensibly leading him to “the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 1:13). That is why the vast majority of mankind live so securely and peacefully. It has always appeared strange to the godly why the ungodly can be so unconcerned while under sentence of death, and conduct themselves so frivolously and gaily while exposed to the wrath to come. John was surprised to see the wicked spending their days in carnality and feasting. David was grieved at the prosperity of the wicked and could not account for their not being in trouble as other men. Amos was astonished to behold the sinners in Zion living at ease, putting far away from them the evil day, lying upon beds of ivory. Nothing but their spiritual blindness can explain the conduct of the vast majority of mankind, crying peace and safety when exposed to impending destruction.

Since all sinners are involved in such spiritual darkness as makes them unaware of their present condition and condemnation, then it is not surprising that they are so displeased when their fearful danger is plainly pointed out. Such faithful preaching tends to disturb their present peace and comfort, and destroys all their future hopes and prospect of happiness. If they were once made to truly realize their imminent danger of the damnation of hell, their ease, security and joy, would be completely dispelled. They cannot bear, therefore, to hear the plain truth respecting their wretchedness and guilt. Sinners could not bear to hear the plain teachings of the prophets or Christ on this account. It was this which explains their bitter complaints and fierce opposition. Those who would befriend them are regarded as enemies—they stop their ears and flee from them.

That the natural man, yea even the most zealous religionist, has no perception of his spiritual blindness, and that he is highly displeased when charged with the same, is evident from, “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (Joh 9:39-41). It was for the purpose of bringing to light the hidden things of darkness that God’s Son became incarnate—to expose things that those made conscious of their blindness might receive sight, but that they who had spiritual sight in their own estimation should be “made blind”—judicially abandoned to the pride of their evil hearts. But for such an experience the infatuated Pharisees had no desire, and denying their blindness were left in their sin.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3). He cannot see the things of God because by nature he is enveloped in total spiritual darkness, and even though external light be given him, yet he has no eyes with which to see. “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Joh 1:5). No, when the Lord of life and light appeared in their midst, men had no eyes to see His beauty, but despised and rejected Him. And so it is still—every verse in Scripture which treats of the Spirit’s illumination confirms this solemn fact. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the

face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). This giving of light and knowledge is by divine power, being analogous to that by which the light at the first creation was provided. As to all spiritual, saving knowledge of the truth, the mind of fallen man is like the chaos before God said, Let there be light—“darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Gen 1:2), and in that state it is impossible for men to understand the things of the Spirit.

But not only is the understanding of the natural man completely under the dominion of darkness, but his will is paralyzed unto good, and if that is so, then the sinner is indeed impotent. As this branch of our subject will (D.V.) come before us in future articles we shall only touch briefly upon it here. The fact itself is made clear by Christ when He affirmed, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44). And why is it that the sinner cannot come to Christ by his own unaided powers? Because he has no inclination to do so, and therefore no volition in that direction. “Ye will not come to me,” said the Saviour (Joh 5:40), or “ye are unwilling” or “have not the will to come to me” as the Greek might be rendered. There is not the slightest desire in the unregenerate heart to do so.

The will of fallen man is depraved, being completely in bondage to sin. It is not merely that there is a negative lack of inclination, but there is a positive disinclination. The unwillingness consists of aversion, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). And not only is there an aversion against God, there is a hatred of Him. Said Christ to His disciples, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (Joh 15:18). This hatred is inveterate obstinacy, “The LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people” (Exo 32:9), “All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21). Man is incorrigible and in himself his case is hopeless. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3)—because they have no power whatsoever of their own to effect such willingness.

Finally, since we have demonstrated from the Scriptures of truth that the natural man is utterly unable to discern spiritual things, much less to choose them, there is little need for us to labour the point that he is quite incompetent to perform any spiritual act. Nor is this only a logical inference drawn by theologians. It is expressly affirmed in the Word—“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). There is no denying the meaning of that terrible indictment, as there is no likelihood of its originating with man himself. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). No, all power to direct our steps in the paths of righteousness was lost by us at the all, and therefore are we entirely dependent upon God to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13).

Little as this solemn truth of man’s moral impotency is known today, and widely as it is denied by modern thought and teaching, there was a time when it was generally contended for in these favoured Isles. In proof we will give short quotations and therewith close this article. In the “Thirty nine Articles” of the Church of England (to which all her ministers must still solemnly and formally subscribe) the Tenth reads thus, “The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God.” In the Westminster Confession of Faith (the Standard of Presbyterianism) chapter 6 begins thus, “Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original

righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”

## THE HOLY SABBATH

### *9. Its Opposition*

Popery succeeded at length in well-nigh wearing out the saints and exterminating all who had borne testimony against her pernicious errors. The Waldensian church was almost wholly destroyed or silenced. A reformation was attempted in Bohemia, but it was ruthlessly suppressed. Long had the Scriptures been a sealed book, not only to the masses, but because of their gross ignorance, to many of the priests as well. There had ceased to be any Christian Sabbath in the sense of a holy rest in the lands where Romanism dominated. The Lord’s Day had been degraded into a day of special recreation, amusement, public shows and exhibitions—in short, of anything and everything to the utmost possible degree distinct and remote from the very appearance of sacredness. Thus the devil seemed to have triumphed completely.

But a mighty change was impending, one which made manifest the Lord’s supremacy. As it is in the material world, so it is in the moral and spiritual realms. As the Creator has given to the sea His decree, saying, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11), so as Governor of this world He has limited the triumphs of the wicked. In the early part of the 16th century, Satan received a check from which his kingdom has never fully recovered to this day. Under the Reformation the distinctive truths and principles of Christianity were once more publicly proclaimed and anti Christian errors and practices boldly denounced.

In our day there are few who perceive the immensity of the task which confronted the Reformers, the difficulties they had to overcome, or the perils to which they were exposed. Papal despotism had to be encountered in the very heyday of its pride and power. Her monstrous fictions, superstitions, and idolatrous rites had to be swept away before a true and pure Christianity could appear. The vital truths of divine revelation had to be virtually re discovered. First to be rescued and preached was the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. Then the Bible had to be translated from the dead languages into the living tongues of many lands, and given to the people as the alone Standard of faith and sole Rule of character and conduct. Then came the tremendous task of rescuing the Lord’s Day from the obscurity to which it had been consigned, when buried beneath the multitude of festival days of human invention.

The work of the Reformers was so vast, so difficult, and so arduous, and was executed under such unfavourable conditions that we need not be surprised if parts of it were not so well done as were others, or that they never themselves erred. Rather must we marvel and be thankful that so much good was accomplished under their instrumentality. In regard to the Lord’s Day they failed to give a sufficiently clear and decisive exposition. While they rightly adopted the principle that the whole of the Old Testament economy was typical and had its fulfillment in the New Testament dispensation—thus disposing of the Romish figment of an official priesthood with

sacrifices in the Christian church—yet they misapplied the same principle in connection with the Sabbath. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say, they applied it in such a way as to fail in establishing the right foundations on which the sacred obligations of that day now rests.

While it is quite clear that the Reformers themselves contended for the necessity and obligation of the Christian Sabbath, maintaining the same in their own personal examples, yet it must also be admitted that they employed language and uttered sentiments which were only too susceptible of being perverted and misapplied. This in fact quickly took place, especially in the Lutheran churches. Never so sound doctrinally as the Calvinists, they soon became lax in their Sabbath observance. So much so was this the case that one reliable writer tells us, “To such a degree was this the case, that many pious men among the ministers of the Lutheran churches seem to have been in doubt whether the fierce wars which so long desolated Germany were to be regarded as the cause of the extreme Sabbath profanation which prevailed, or as judgments inflicted on the community on account of that profanation.”

The most striking and extensive demonstration of the connection between Sabbath observance and religious prosperity was seen in the British Isles in the seventeenth century. All who are acquainted with the history of that period know that the Puritans were particularly distinguished by their strict adherence to the sacred rest of the Lord’s Day. Nor was this characteristic confined either to the Scots or to those who separated themselves from the Established church, but pertained also to those who remained within her pale. It is not generally known that the Westminster Confession of Faith, which contains the strongest assertion of the divine authority and inviolable sanctity of the Christian Sabbath ever produced, was framed by a body of about one hundred and twenty divines of whom only four were Scottish and five were Independents—all the rest having received Episcopal ordination.

Now the very times when the sanctity of the Sabbath was most diligently maintained in England were those in which pure and spiritual religion was in its highest state of freedom and prosperity, and the men under whose instrumentality this obtained are the ones whose writings are still the most precious treasure of English religious literature. Never was the smile of heaven more apparent, never did true piety flourish so extensively, never has the power of the Holy Spirit been so manifest since the days of the apostles, yet never was a season of divine blessing so abruptly terminated. As the restoration of Charles the Second marked the overthrow of English Puritanism, so it brought in a flood of licentiousness which soon swept over the country, for unregenerate courtiers and commoners united together in throwing odium on Sabbath observance as a product of Puritanical fanaticism.

The awful effects of widespread Sabbath desecration were soon evident, for the judgments of God fell heavily upon both the religious and social life of the nation. The first half of the eighteenth century was marked by the most awful errors in the pulpit, spiritual death in the pew, and infidelity and profligacy amongst the masses, who were only too glad to be freed from the righteous restraints which pious legislators had placed upon them. Once again Satan had won a notable victory. But not for long was he suffered to enjoy the spoils of the same. Under the fearless preaching of George Whitefield and his fellows, revival was granted and true godliness given fresh life, and the Lord’s Day was once more restored unto its rightful place.

During the nineteenth century, the great enemy of God and man entered upon a new campaign, seeking to undermine the foundations of this divine institution, attacking it from the doctrinal side. He blinded the minds of those who professed to be the ministers of Christ, and alleged champions of the truth, causing many of them to believe that the Sabbath was obsolete, pertaining not to this dispensation—and leading others to suppose that the observance of the

Sabbath in this Christian era is mainly a matter of individual option, and that a much wider latitude in what they term “Christian liberty” is now permissible. In consequence thereof, Satan succeeded in banishing all witness to the Sabbath from thousands of pulpits, and caused the standard to be grievously lowered in most of the remaining ones. This acted like a poisonous leaven, the effects from which spread widely, until the rank and file of church goers had no conscience on the subject—so long as they attended service once or twice, they felt they had fully discharged the obligations of the Lord’s Day.

Little sagacity is required to foretell the effect upon the masses of such a poisoning of the ministry. To use a military figure, the muzzling of the pulpit on this vital truth was like the silencing of the guns on a fortress. “Once its cannons are put out of action, the capture of the citadel quickly follows. When those who were looked up to as the expounders of the divine law discredited the Sabbath, then who was left to offer real resistance to godless politicians playing fast and loose with those statutes of the realm which had once been framed for the purpose of preventing Sabbath profanation? If the rank and file of professing Christians considered they had discharged the obligations of the Sabbath merely by attending one or two religious services on that day, then need we be surprised if the irreligious masses clamoured louder and louder for a “brighter Sunday” and that those in governmental authority more and more yielded to their demands!

We shall now consider some of the arguments made use of by those who have insisted that the Sabbath pertains not to this dispensation. First, it has been asserted that the Ten Commandments were never given to anyone but the Jews. Such a postulate is most absurd. If the Moral Law be not binding upon Gentiles, then by what standard will God judge them? “Where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom 4:15). The erroneousness of such a postulate is made clearly manifest by, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). Nothing could be plainer than that the whole human race is “under the law” and every member of it is brought in guilty by the same.

Second, it has been asserted that, whatever be the status and state of the unregenerate, yet Christians are “not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). Those who have read this magazine for any length of time will not be misled here by the mere sound of words. We have often explained their sense, and shown that the believer is no longer “under the law” as a covenant of works, nor is he any more under its awful curse and condemnation—but as 1 Corinthians 9:21 definitely declares, he is “under the law to Christ”—under it as a Rule of conduct. The Christian is required to “so to walk, even as he [the Lord Jesus] walked” (1Jo 2:6), and Christ ever walked in perfect accord with the Moral Law (Psa 40:8). The Holy Spirit has been given to the Christian for the express purpose of enabling him therein, the love of God being shed abroad in his heart for its fulfillment (Rom 5:8 and 13:8 10).

It has been objected by others that the Sabbath precept in the Old Testament was entirely of a typical and ceremonial nature, looking forward to that spiritual rest which Christ should provide, and that when the substance was brought in, the shadow was done away. But were that the case, then the Moral Law consists of only nine and not “Ten Commandments” as Deuteronomy 4:13 specifically declares. The very fact that the Sabbath statute was incorporated into the Decalogue unequivocally denotes its essential moral character, and therefore, its lasting nature—the fourth commandment was, like the other nine, written by the finger of JEHOVAH upon the tables of stone, but no part of the ceremonial law was. Moreover, the Sabbath was instituted long before any part of the ceremonial law was given to Israel, before there were any types or shadows,

before any promise of Christ was made. The Sabbath was appointed in Eden before the fall, before there was any need for sacrifices!

Appeal has been made unto Galatians 4:10-11 by those who are determined to banish the Sabbath from this dispensation, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” The reference there is to the Judaizing of the Galatian saints—to their being brought under bondage to the ceremonial law of Israel. False teachers had gone so far as to insist they must be circumcised in order to salvation. see Galatians 5:2, 6; 6:15. The “days” and “months” were those connected with the Jewish festivals, which were now obsolete. The very fact that the Holy Spirit here designated them, “the weak and beggarly elements” (Gal 4:9) is clear proof that the Christian Sabbath was not there included, for it could never be described in such a way.

Appeal has also been made to, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days” (Col 2:16). This is the favourite verse of those who insist that the Sabbath is not binding on Christians. That they refer to such a passage shows how untenable is their position. The Greek word here for “Sabbath” is in the plural number (as the translators denoted by adding “days” in italics), which intimates it is not the weekly Sabbath or the Moral Law that is in view. Moreover, there is no definite article before “Sabbaths,” which is proof positive that the weekly Sabbath was not before the apostle’s mind. It was to things connected with the ceremonial law against which the Colossians were being warned, as the “meat,” “drink,” and “new moon” show.

Some have raised a silly objection drawn from the difference made by the meridian, from which it is argued it is impossible that all men could observe precisely the same day, and therefore God never intended they should. Now if men sailing either eastward or westward did not continually have seven days succeeding one another there would be some force in this trifle, but since the Sabbath statute simply requires from men one seventh of their time, or a seventh day, separated unto God and sanctified to His service, the objection is quite pointless. That the observance of this rest day should in all parts of the earth begin and end at the same minute, the Scriptures nowhere enjoin nor does the creation of God permit. It is sufficient that whether living in the northern or the southern hemisphere that all men observe the same proportion of time.

After all our articles on the Christianization of the Sabbath, especially the exposition of Hebrews 4:8 10, there is little need for us to refute seriatim the errors of those who insist that the Sabbath should, even now, be kept on Saturday rather than Sunday. The essential feature to be noted is that God requires us to set apart one seventh of our time and consecrate the same unto His worship. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it specified that the Lord ever commanded any people to observe the seventh day of the week—rather six days of work (without defining which days) followed by one of rest. Nor does the transference of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday involve any alteration in the law, but merely a change in its administration.

It is true that the apostles for a season, while their ministry had a special regard for the Jews (Rom 1:16), for the conversion of that remnant among them according to the election of grace, went frequently into their synagogues on the seventh day to preach the Gospel (Act 13:14; 16:13, etc.). Yet it is evident they did so only to take opportunity of their assemblies, that they might preach to greater numbers of them, and that at a time when they were prepared to attend unto sacred things. Upon the same ground and for the same reason we find Paul endeavouring to be at Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost (Act 20:16). But we nowhere read that Christians at any time assembled together on the seventh day for the worship of God.

And now our task is completed, very imperfectly so, we are fully conscious. But if the Lord is pleased to own these feeble efforts unto a stirring up of His people for a stricter observing of this divine ordinance and in using their influence to protest against its awful profanation, we shall not have laboured in vain.

*“A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content,  
And strength for the toils of the morrow:  
But a Sabbath profaned, whate’er may be gained,  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.”*

## FAITH TO WORK MIRACLES

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). We have already seen that this promise was made to those who had been endowed with supernatural powers, and that it was given for the purpose of encouraging them to exercise faith that Christ would continue to assist in their working of miracles, for the glory of His name and the good of His cause. We have also shown that the apostles themselves had no warrant whatever to apply this particular promise to ordinary blessings of either a temporal or spiritual nature. It should, therefore, be quite apparent that Christians today have no right to appropriate this promise unto themselves and expect a literal fulfillment of the same. To make this still clearer, let the following considerations be carefully weighed.

Even the primitive Christians themselves were not all endowed with supernatural gifts. Proof of this is found in that statement of the apostles, “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1Co 12:29-30). This is the more striking in that those extraordinary gifts abounded more copiously at Corinth than in any of the apostolic churches, yet these questions, with their strong emphasis, clearly denotes that there was not an equality of endowment. Paul’s obvious design here was to suppress on the one hand all discontent and envy, and on the other all pride and arrogance, for he had expressly reminded them that the Spirit apportioned His gifts “to every man severally as he will” (1Co 12:11).

The manifest limitation of the promise we are here considering forbids that Christians today should give it a general and universal application, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). There are very few passages in Scripture where the expression “all things” is to be understood without qualification, and certainly this is not one of those few. The preceding “and” clearly connects with what is said in verse 21, and therefore must signify all such things as are there in view, namely, the working of miracles. As we have previously pointed out, this promise did not even give the apostles themselves carte blanche, so that if they prayed for anything whatever (provided they did so with unshaken faith) they were infallibly assured of receiving the same. How much less, then, may ordinary Christians today give such a scope to this promise!

Scripture itself records more than one instance of pious souls earnestly supplicating God for certain things, and the Holy Spirit has conveyed no suggestion that it was because they prayed

unbelievably their requests were not granted. Moses (Deu 3:23-26) is a case in point. So also David both fasted and prayed on behalf of his sick child that it might recover, yet it died (2Sa 12:16-19). So, too, in this New Testament era, we find that the beloved apostle besought the Lord thrice that his thorn in the flesh might be removed (2Co 12:7-9), yet it was not—though he received assurance from the Lord, “My grace is sufficient for thee”—to endure the affliction. Most certainly Paul was acquainted with this promise in Matthew 21:22! Surely, then, Christians now have no right to exercise faith in it when praying for anything.

If Christians of this day determine to appropriate Matthew 21:22 unto themselves, then they must do so on the principle that believing a thing to be true will make it true. The language used by Christ on that occasion is too clear to be mistaken, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”—to the same effect is, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mar 11:24). But this principle that believing a thing to be true necessarily makes it true is manifestly untenable and erroneous. Were I to pray for the salvation of one whom God had not eternally chosen in Christ, no believing on my part would effect his salvation—and to insist that God should save him, would be presumption and not faith. If I were seriously sick and believed God would heal me, no such believing would bring my healing to pass. And if such were not the Lord’s will for me, then such “believing” would be fanaticism and not faith.

Since Christians in our day have no right to appropriate this special promise to themselves, they have no warrant to ask for any favour, whether temporal or spiritual, private or public, absolutely and unsubmitively. True prayer is not an endeavouring to bring the divine will into subjection to ours, but a seeking to yield up our wills to God’s. What the Lord has predestinated cannot be changed by any appeals of ours, for with Him there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17). God’s eternal decrees were framed by perfect goodness and unerring wisdom, and therefore He has no need to forego the execution of any part of them, “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth” (Job 23:13). It is a most grotesque and God-dishonouring idea to suppose that prayer has been appointed for the purpose of the creature’s exercising his persuasive powers so as to induce the Almighty to give something He does not wish to bestow.

“This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14). Ah, that is what we need to lay hold of and act upon in this blatant and presumptuous age. We come to the throne of grace not as dictators, but suppliants. We approach the One seated thereon not as equals, but as beggars. We go there not to demand our rights, but to beg favours. We stand not on our dignity, but bow the knee in conscious unworthiness. We present not ultimatums, but make “requests.” And those requests we do not make in a spirit of self-assertiveness, but in humble submissiveness. If we approach the throne of grace in a correct frame, we go there conscious of our ignorance and foolishness, fully assured that the Lord knows far better than we what it would be good to bestow upon us and what would be best to withhold from us.

God has infallibly purposed when and where and upon whom He will bestow His favour, and Christians have no right, and when in their right mind, no desire to ask Him to alter any of His determinations respecting either themselves or others. Consequently, since they have no means of knowing beforehand what He has decreed concerning the granting of any specific favour, they are not justified in asking Him for anything absolutely, but rather must they proffer each request with unreserved submission to His good pleasure. They may greatly desire to see the salvation of some particular person, but as they know not whether he is one of God’s elect, they must not ask for it

unconditionally, but subject to His divine purpose. They may have a loved one who is seriously sick, and while it is both their duty and privilege to ask for his or her recovery, yet they must not pray for the same absolutely but in subjection to the will of God.

Christ has left us a perfect example of submission in prayer, as in everything else. Behold Him in the garden of Gethsemane—the ante-chamber of Calvary—entering upon His inconceivable sufferings. Mark His posture—He is not erect, but on His knees, and later on His face. Hearken to His language, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:42). It was His holy desire for the Father to remove that awful cup from Him, if He were graciously pleased to do so, but if not—He asked that His petition might be denied and the will of His Father done. Can we in the face of that, my reader, come before God and insist that any request of ours be granted irrespective of whether or not it be accordant with the divine will? No indeed, rather must we earnestly seek grace to emulate the example left us by the Redeemer.

Sad indeed is it to witness and read of much that is going on in the religious world today. Nor is it that the lawless spirit of the age has had an evil influence upon the churches—rather did the evil begin in the churches and later infest society generally. The law of God was banished from the pulpits before lawlessness became so rife in the state. Irreverence characterized the pew before infidelity stalked the streets. The Most High was insulted in public prayer before it became the common thing to take His name in vain on the stage and over the air. Instead of bowing before the throne of grace, many conducted their public “devotions” as though they themselves occupied that throne. Genuine and unreserved submission to the divine will is now a thing of the past save among that insignificant remnant who have been given broken and contrite hearts.

Since Christians have no right, at this date, to exercise faith in the promise of Matthew 21:22, then clearly they have no right to exercise faith in their own peculiar feelings. The apostles themselves who possessed supernatural powers did not believe that all things whatsoever they asked in faith should be granted to them because they had peculiar feelings respecting what they asked for. But they believed that when they requested a miracle should be wrought by them, Christ would enable them thereto, because they based their faith on His promise to that end. They knew that promise was made to their faith, and not to their feelings. That being the case with the apostles themselves, how much less may the ordinary Christian now claim a fulfillment of Matthew 21:22, because of some strong feeling he is the subject of!

But though Christians today have no such promise to rest upon as Matthew 21:22, some of them have a deep feeling that what they pray for shall be granted. That is quite wrong and reprehensible. We have no Scriptural warrant whatever to base our confidence of being heard upon any feeling, however deep and persistent, and must not expect God to answer us unless we can plead some promise of His. There are no promises made in the Word to any feelings. All the promises of the Gospel are made to holy exercises or affections, and to nothing in which men are entirely passive. Our hearts are deceitful above all things, and those who rely upon inward impulses and secret feelings are in great danger of running into the grossest errors and the wildest delusions. Evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit can impress our minds.

Many have prayed for particular favours with the mistaken assurance that if they ask for them in unwavering faith those favours would certainly be granted them. This idea “led George Whitefield confidently to expect what he had no right to confidently expect. He had an amiable, promising little son, whom he ardently desired and prayed might be an eminently useful minister, and he had such strong and agreeable feelings concerning him that he confidently expected that he would be what he ardently desired and prayed that he might be. But his son died when he was

about four years old and the event not only disappointed him, but cured him of his error” (Nathanael Emmons [1745-1840], to whom we are indebted for several thoughts in this discussion). We may add that when Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) lay dying, tens of thousands fasted and offered special prayer for the sparing of his life, but as the sequel showed, such was not according to God’s will.

In seeking to correct one error we must endeavour to guard against another. Though the promise of Matthew 21:22 belongs not unto us today, there are scores of promises in both the Old and New Testaments which Christians may lawfully take to themselves and plead before God. In those promises, they have all the encouragement to pray in faith which they can reasonably desire. God has never said to the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye me in vain” (Isa 45:19), but has assured them that if they pray aright they shall be heard, and either receive what they ask for or something more for His glory and their good. In order to pray aright, they must pray with a real desire for the things they request, and with a genuine submission to the will of God, whether He shall grant or deny their petitions. When a believer presents suitable petitions unto God, in a right manner, grounded on the divine promises, then he should not doubt either His willingness or ability to grant them, either on account of his own unworthiness or because of any difficulty in the way. “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14).



# May

## **GODLY SORROW**

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner” (2Co 7:9). In his former epistle the apostle had sharply rebuked the Corinthians for sins which had not only been committed by them but tolerated among them. Though it be far from a pleasant task, yet it is the bounden duty of the ministers of the Gospel to rebuke sin when it is found in those under their charge. “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2Ti 4:2). In this instance it pleased God to bless the faithful admonition of His servant, so that those to whom he wrote had been brought to mourn over and right their wrongs. It is to this repenting of theirs that Paul here alludes, in the course of which he draws an important distinction between carnal and spiritual sorrowing over sin, a distinction which it is most essential we should duly note and take to heart.

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance” (2Co 7:9). The preacher takes no more delight when he witnesses the anguish of those who are under conviction of sin than does the surgeon when he inflicts pain on his patients. The servants of Christ experience no pleasure in looking upon the distress of their hearers. It is only because the sinner’s sorrow is a hopeful sign of his return to God and of his future happiness as the outcome, that they rejoice at such fruits of their labours. A parent, when he sees his child weeping because of his offenses, sincerely rejoices however much he sympathizes in his grief. So, too, was the apostle made happy when he perceived that the Corinthians had sorrowed to good effect, namely, unto repentance or reformation of conduct. Here is proof that evangelical repentance is not only a change of heart, but a transformation of life as well.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance” (2Co 7:9) distinguishes two things which are often confounded. Sorrow for sin and repentance are by no means identical. Sorrow for sin may be awakened in a man, or even in an assembly, yet without any real or lasting benefit therefrom. There is a grief (from wounded pride) which produces resentment and anger against the one who reproves our wicked ways. There is a sorrow (aggravated by Satan) which results in nothing but melancholy and despair. Sorrow in itself is not repentance—neither is remorse, self condemnation, nor external reformation. True, these are all the attendants and consequences, but repentance itself is a turning from sin to holiness. In the case here before us, the apostle rejoiced over a sorrow in the Corinthians which was followed by a putting away of those evils for which he had reproved them.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance” (2Co 7:9). Here, then, is a statement which supplies us with an invaluable criterion by means of which the quality of all real and lasting sorrow may be estimated. Grief may arise, and even reach a passionate extreme, and yet be as unproductive of any transforming effect upon its subjects as the summer dew upon the rock. Such is a self allaying and not a self abasing sorrow. There is a sorrowing over folly and its consequences which is

nothing more than self pity, and remorse is ever blind toward heaven. The vital question, then, is, has our sorrow for sin issued in a genuine repentance? Evangelical repentance is a real change of heart, it is a radical change of views, feelings and aims, resulting in a complete and lasting change of life. Unless our sorrow causes us to put away the evils which formerly characterized us, then it is a repentance which needs to be “repented of,” for it is fruitless and valueless.

“For ye were made sorry after a godly manner” (2Co 7:9). This is explanatory of the previous clause, making known to us how it was that the Corinthians came to sorrow “to repentance.” How it behooves us, then, to diligently inquire as to exactly what is meant by this sorrowing “after a godly manner,” or as the margin gives it, “according to God.” Godly sorrow is one which has respect wholly to God, for it is one which He demands, one which He produces, and one which leads to Himself. First, it is such a sorrow as the thrice Holy One requires from those upon whom He would bestow pardon of their sins—true alike of our first conversion and of each subsequent recovery from backsliding, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Act 3:19). Though this godly sorrow to repentance is not the ground of our salvation, yet it is both a part of and a necessary condition to it. Those who repent are saved—the impenitent perish (Luk 13:5). It is that inward change in which salvation largely consists. Grief and humiliation for sin as sin—sin against God—are an essential part of those “fruits meet for repentance” (Mat 3:8).

Second, this “godly sorrow” is produced by divine power. It is essentially a supernatural grace. No man is born with godly sorrow in his heart as he is born with a tongue in his head. No, it is a seed of God’s own setting, a flower of His planting. It is a heavenly offspring. “God maketh my heart soft,” said holy Job (Job 23:16), for none but He can make the heart tender under a sight and sense of sin. Nature can easily make one weep over worldly crosses and losses, but only divine grace can move us to mourn over sin. That godly sorrow to repentance is produced by the immediate operations of the Lord is clear from the order in, “Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh” (Jer 31:19). Note well it is not “after I turned,” but “after I was turned.” That is the language of one who has just been renewed, quickened afresh by the Word, and who now sees light in God’s light.

Third, it is such a sorrow as leads to God. All sin is a departing from God, and while the guilt of it remains upon the conscience we cannot be easy in His presence—witness Adam, who as soon as he heard the voice of the Lord God, sought to hide himself (Gen 3:8). But when godly sorrow is wrought in the heart by God it is the means of recovery to Him, for it makes us conscious of our distance from God and of our having dishonoured and displeased Him. Necessarily so, for godly sorrow is “to repentance,” and repentance is a forsaking of sin so as to walk in newness of life. A contrite heart instinctively turns unto God, for it is the only one which possesses any title to His mercy, “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17). Indeed He will not, for His promise is, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:2). Such a sorrowing to repentance is approved by God, for it is the product of His own grace and accomplishes its end by restoring to Himself.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *14. The Law and Love—Matthew 5:43-48*

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45). For a right understanding of this most important verse, it is highly essential that it be not divorced from what is recorded in verses 43 and 44. As we have shown at length the last two months, our Lord’s purpose in the last six verses of Matthew 5 was to purge this great and general commandment—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev 19:18)—from the corrupt interpretations of the Jewish teachers, and to restore it to its true and proper meaning. That love which the Moral Law demands is something vastly superior to what we term “natural affection,” which is found in the most godless, and in a lesser degree even in animals. The love which the divine law requires is a holy, pure, disinterested, and spiritual one—exemplified perfectly by Christ. Such a love the unregenerate have not.

In these pages we have often affirmed that God’s design in regeneration is to bring us back unto conformity with His holy law. Therein we may perceive the beautiful harmony which exists between the distinctive workings of each of the three persons in the blessed Trinity. The Father, as the supreme Governor of the world, framed the Moral Law as a transcript of His holy nature and an authoritative expression of His righteous will. The Son, in His office as Mediator, magnified the law and made it honourable by rendering to it a personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, and then by voluntarily enduring its curse in the place of His people, who had broken it. The Holy Spirit, as the Executive of the Godhead, convicts the elect of their wicked violation of the Moral Law, slaying their enmity against it, and imparting to them a nature or principle the very essence of which is to delight in and serve that law (Rom 7:22-25).

Originally, the Moral Law was imprinted upon the very heart of man. Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27) which, among other things, signifies that they were morally conformed unto their Maker. Consequently, the very “nature” of unfallen man caused him to render loving and loyal obedience to his King. But when he fell, this was reversed. The “image” of God was broken and His “likeness” was greatly marred, though not completely effaced, for as the apostle points out, the heathen which had not the law in its written form “did by nature [some of] the things contained in the law,” and thereby they “showed the work of the law written in their hearts,” their conscience being proof of the same (see Rom 2:14-15). At the fall, love for the divine law was supplanted by hatred, and submission and obedience gave place to enmity and opposition.

Such is the condition of unregenerate man the world over—he is a rebel against the Most High, trampling His commandments beneath his feet. It is for this very reason he needs to be born again, that is, be made the subject of a miracle of grace wrought in his heart. At conversion he is “reconciled to God”—his hostility against Him receives its death wound and he throws down the weapons of his warfare. The new birth is a being “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10). It is a new creation, a creation “in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). Thereby the regenerate recover that which they lost in Adam—a nature which is in harmony with the divine will. At the new birth God makes good that promise, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). Putting His laws in our mind means effectually applying them unto us, writing them in our hearts signifies the enshrining of them in our affections.

What is the character of that righteousness which Christ requires from the subjects of His kingdom?—a righteousness which excels that practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. It is conformity in heart and life to the Moral Law of God. What evidence do Christians give that they have been born again? Why the fact that they now walk “in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Wherein lies the proof they are now reconciled to God? In their heartily responding to His revealed will. How may we identify those who have been renewed by the Spirit? By seeing displayed in them the features of the divine image. What is the fruit of God’s putting His laws into our minds and writing them in our hearts? Surely, our running in the way of His commandments. Whereby shall the world take knowledge of us that we have been with the Lord Jesus? By seeing that we have drunk in His spirit and by our producing that which rises above the level of mere nature, which can issue only from a supernatural spring.

Now it is of this very thing Christ speaks here in Matthew 5:45, “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good” etc. First, let it be pointed out, “that ye may be the children of your Father” certainly does not denote “that ye may become such”—no, they were already His regenerate people, as is clear from Christ’s contrasting them from the world—“What do ye more than others?” (Mat 5:47). “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:45), obviously denotes “that ye may thereby approve yourselves so, that ye may manifest yourselves to be such.” Lest this interpretation appear somewhat strained, we refer the reader to a parallel case in 2 Corinthians 6, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters” (2Co 6:17-18). Those exhortations were addressed to “saints” (2Co 1:1), and the promise was that upon their compliance therewith God would manifest Himself as a Father unto them and they would give proof of being His sons and daughters.

Because it is against the nature of fallen man to love his enemies, therefore our Saviour here encouraged His followers unto the exercise of such heavenly conduct by pressing upon them the benefit therefrom—by so doing they would give demonstration that they were the children of God. A similar inducement had been held out by Him in an earlier section of this sermon, when He said to the officers of His kingdom, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 5:16). It is not sufficient that we profess ourselves to be the children of God—our works must declare it. If we have to wear some button or badge on the lapel of our coats so as to evidence we are Christians, that is a poor way of doing so—we must by our “good works” glorify God (1Pe 2:12), we must “shew forth his praises in our daily lives” (see 1Pe 2:9).

The force of the first half of verse 45 is clearly established by what follows, “For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45). Children resemble their parents—there is an identifying likeness between them. The character and conduct of God, in this connection, is well-known. His providences declare His benignity. Not only does God bear with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, but He bestows upon them many favours. So far from making a distinction in this matter, He disburses temporal blessings among the just and the unjust alike. As the Gospel of Luke expresses it, “He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luk 6:35). Therein He sets His people an example to follow, hence the force of the apostolic injunction, “Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us” (Eph 5:1-2).

From this reason or inducement here given by Christ to enforce His exhortation in verse 44, we may perceive what are the things in which Christians should principally employ themselves—namely, in those things in the doing of which they may obtain evidence that they are the children of God. How many Christians there are who lament their lack of assurance. And in most cases this is not to be wondered at. If they are so zealous in serving self rather than Christ, if they run so greedily after the things the world is absorbed with, how can it be otherwise? There is an inseparable connection between Romans 8:14 and 16. We must be led of the Spirit (and not resist His motions) if we are to have Him bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We must be more diligent in cultivating supernatural fruit if we would have clearer evidence of a supernatural root dwelling within us.

Ere passing on let us note how Christ here spoke of the common gifts of God in creation and providence, “He maketh his sun to rise” (Mat 5:45). It is not simply “the sun”—it is His sun and not ours. It is His by creation and His by regulation, making it go forward or backward as He pleases. The Lord is the sole Author and Governor of this heavenly body, for He continues to give it being and determines its power and virtue. The same thing is equally true of every other creature in heaven, earth, or sea. In like manner He “sendeth the rain” on its specific mission. He has appointed where and when it shall fall, so that “one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered” (Amo 4:7). Finally, note the terms by which Christ designates those who are the friends of God and those who are His enemies—good and just, evil and unjust—the first term relating to character, the second to conduct.

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” (Mat 5:46). In this and the following verse, Christ propounded another reason to persuade His disciples and hearers to love their enemies, the force of which is only apparent when we understand who the “publicans” are. The “publicans” were those officers who collected taxes and tributes, rates and rents from the Jews for the Roman emperor, to whom the Jews were then in subjection. Some of the most degenerate of the Jews undertook this wretched work for the money they could get out of it. From Luke 19:8, it appears that the publicans resorted to injustice and oppression in order to fatten their own purses, and consequently they were the most hated and despised of all people (Mat 9:11; 11:19). Yet, (says Christ) even these publicans, though devoid of conscience, would love those who loved them, and if we do no more, what better are we than they?

It is not that Christ here forbids us to love those who love us, but rather that He is condemning a merely carnal love—for one man to love another simply because he is loved by the other is nothing else than a man loving himself in another. In order to love our neighbour rightly and in a manner acceptable to the Lord, we must heed the following rule—all the commandments of the second table must be obeyed from the same principle as those in the first table, namely, love to God. Parents are to be honoured in God and for God, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord” (Eph 6:1), and my neighbour must be loved in God and for God, even though he be my enemy. Why? Because he is as truly God’s creature as I am and because God has commanded me to love him. That must be the ground of our obedience, though from other respects our love may increase for our neighbour.

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?” (Mat 5:46). In this question Christ emphasizes a principle which it is our wisdom to heed in the ordering of our lives, namely, that we give ourselves especially to the doing of those things to which is attached the promise of God’s reward. To make this the more forcible and impressive let us ask, What was it that moved Moses to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, which caused him to forsake the

treasures of Egypt and to suffer affliction with the people of God? The Holy Spirit has told us—it was because he had “respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb 11:26). But how little is this truth believed in and the principle acted on today or why so much trifling away of our time? What reward can they look for at God’s hand who give themselves up to “the pleasures of sin?” (Heb 11:25).

“And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?” (Mat 5:47). Christ’s drift in these words is the same as in the previous verse, the design of such repetition being that this weighty truth may be fixed the more firmly and deeply in our minds. We are so slow in performing the duties of love, particularly unto our enemies, that the duty of it needs to be pressed upon us again and again. If He who spake as never man spake saw well to frequently repeat Himself, His underservants need not hesitate to do the same. Not only are we to pray for those who hate and injure us, but we are to greet them when they cross our path. How wrong then to deliberately pass a brother on the street and treat him as though he were an utter stranger to us! Nor do the words, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2Jo 1:10) militate to the slightest degree against what has just been said. It is personal or private enemies that Christ had in view, whereas 2 John 10 refers to those who are the open enemies of God.

“What do ye more than others?” (Mat 5:47). What a searching question is this! And note well the precise form of it. It is not, “What know ye more than others” nor, “What profess ye more than others?” or even, “What believe ye more than others?” but “What DO ye more than others?” Yet care must be taken that this inquiry be not perverted. If on the one hand, it is of first importance that the Gospel trumpet give forth no uncertain sound when proclaiming the cardinal truth of justification by faith, yet it is equally essential to make it plain that saving faith always identifies itself by the works which it produces. Justification before God is by faith alone, but it is not a faith which remains alone. Saving faith is not a lifeless, inoperative, and sterile thing, but a living, active, fruit producing principle. And it is by the fruit which a saving faith produces that it is distinguished from the worthless and unproductive faith of the empty professor.

Saving faith is the gift of God. It is a supernatural principle inwrought by the Holy Spirit at the new birth. And this faith is evidenced by its fruits. It is a faith which “worketh by love” (Gal 5:6). It is a faith that “purifieth the heart” (see Act 15:9). It is a faith that “overcometh the world” (1Jo 5:4). And since those who are the favoured subjects of this faith have more than others, they ought to do more, they can do more, yea they will do more than the unregenerate. The thing which above all others has brought the cause of Christ into such general contempt in the world is because millions of those claiming to be His followers do not do more, but often considerably less, than many who make no such profession—they are less truthful, less honest, less unselfish, less benevolent. It is not what we say, but how we conduct ourselves, which most impresses the ungodly.

Christ has good reason to require more from His disciples than He does from the children of the wicked one. They profess more, but unless their profession be supported by facts and verified by works, then it is a vain and hypocritical one—dishonouring to the Saviour, a stumbling block to His people, and an occasion of blasphemy to His enemies. They are more than others. They are loved with an everlasting love, redeemed at infinite cost, indwelt by the Holy Spirit—then should they not produce more than others? “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” It is certain that Christians can do more than others. Said the apostle, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13). A supernatural principle indwells them, the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts, the all-sufficient grace of God is

available to them, and all things are possible to him that believeth. “What do ye more than others?” (Mat 5:47). Answer this question in the presence of God.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48). From all that He had said, Christ now drew this excellent consequence, exhorting His followers to perfection in all the duties of love. “Be ye therefore perfect” is the unchanging requirement of the law, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” is the exalted standard which the Gospel presents to us. The moral excellence of the divine character is the copy and rule set before us, and nothing short of that is to be our sincere, ardent, and constant endeavour. Though such an aim is never fully realized in this life, yet we must say with Paul, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:12). In view of such a confession by the eminent apostle, how baseless and absurd is the pretension of those claiming to have already reached sinless perfection. The fact is that the closer we walk with God, the more will it work in us self-abasement and humiliation and not self complacency and pride.

## **THE LIFE OF ELIJAH**

### *5. By the Brook*

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (1Ki 17:2-3). As pointed out last month, it was not merely to provide Elijah with a safe retreat, to protect His servant from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, that JEHOVAH so commanded the prophet, but to signify His sore displeasure against His apostate people—the withdrawal of the prophet from the scene of public action was an additional judgment on the nation. We cannot forbear pointing out that tragic analogy which now obtains more or less in Christendom. During the past two or three decades, God has removed some eminent and faithful servants of His by the hand of death, and not only has He not replaced them by raising up others in their stead, but an increasing number of those which still remain are being sent into seclusion by Him.

It was both for God’s glory and the prophet’s own good that the Lord bade him “Get thee hence...hide thyself” (1Ki 17:3). It was a call to separation. Ahab was an apostate and his consort was a heathen. Idolatry abounded on every side. JEHOVAH was publicly dishonoured. The man of God could have no sympathy or communion with such a horrible situation. Isolation from evil is absolutely essential if we are to “keep ourselves unspotted from the world” (see Jam 1:27), not only separation from secular wickedness but from religious corruption also. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11) has been God’s demand in every dispensation. Elijah stood as the Lord’s faithful witness in a day of national departure from Himself, and having delivered His testimony to the responsible head, the prophet must now retire. To turn our backs on all that dishonours God is an essential duty.

But where was Elijah to go? He had previously dwelt in the presence of the Lord God of Israel, “before whom I stand” (1Ki 17:1) he could say when pronouncing sentence of judgment unto Ahab, and he should still abide in the secret place of the Most High. The prophet was not left to his own devisings or choice, but directed to a place of God’s own appointing—outside the camp, away from the entire religious system. Degenerate Israel was to know him only as a

witness against themselves. He was to have no place and take no part in either the social or religious life of the nation. He was to turn “eastward”—the quarter from which the morning light arises, for those who are regulated by the divine precepts “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (Joh 8:12). “By the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (1Ki 17:3). Jordan marked the very limits of the land. Typically it spoke of death, and spiritual death now rested upon Israel.

But what a message of hope and comfort the “Jordan” contained for one who was walking with the Lord! How well-calculated was it to speak unto the heart of one whose faith was in a healthy condition! Was it not at this very place that JEHOVAH had shown Himself strong on behalf of His people in the days of Joshua? Was not the Jordan the very scene which had witnessed the miracle-working power of God at the time when Israel left the wilderness behind them? It was there the Lord had said unto Joshua, “This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Jos 3:7). It was there that “the living God” (see Jos 3:10) made the waters to “stand upon a heap” (Jos 3:13), so that “all the Israelites passed over on dry ground” (Jos 3:17). Such are the things which should, and no doubt did, fill the mind of the Tishbite when his Master ordered him to this very place. If his faith was in exercise, his heart would be in perfect peace, knowing that a miracle working God would not fail him there.

It was also for the prophet’s own personal good that the Lord now bade him, “hide thyself” (1Ki 17:3). He was in danger from another quarter than the fury of Ahab. The success of his supplications might prove a snare—tending to fill his heart with pride, and even to harden him against the calamity then desolating the land. Previously he had been engaged in secret prayer, and then for a brief moment he had witnessed a good confession before the king. The future held for him yet more honourable service, for the day was to come when he should witness for God not only in the presence of Ahab, but he should discomfort and utterly rout the assembled hosts of Baal, and in measure at least, turn the wandering nation back again unto the God of their fathers. But the time for that was not ripe, neither was Elijah himself.

The prophet needed further training in secret if he were to be personally fitted to speak again for God in public. Ah, my reader, the man whom the Lord uses has to be kept low—severe discipline has to be experienced by him, if the flesh is to be duly mortified. Three more years must be spent by the prophet in seclusion. How humbling! Alas, how little is man to be trusted—how little is he able to bear being put into the place of honour! How quickly self rises to the surface, and the instrument is ready to believe he is something more than an instrument. How sadly easy it is to make of the very service God entrusts us with a pedestal on which to display ourselves. But God will not share His glory with another, and therefore does He “hide” those who may be tempted to take some of it unto themselves. It is only by retiring from the public view and getting alone with God that we can learn our own nothingness.

We see this important lesson brought out very plainly in Christ’s dealings with His beloved apostles. On one occasion they returned to Him flushed with success and full of themselves. They “told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught” (Mar 6:30). Most instructive is His quiet response, “And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while” (Mar 6:31). This is still His gracious remedy for any of His servants who may be puffed up with their own importance, and imagine that His cause upon earth would suffer a severe loss, if they were removed from it. God often says to His servants, “Get thee hence...hide thyself” (1Ki 17:3). Sometimes it is by the dashing of their ministerial hopes,

sometimes by a bed of affliction, or by a severe bereavement, the divine purpose is accomplished. Happy the one who can then say from his heart, “The will of the Lord be done” (see Mat 6:10).

Every servant that God deigns to use must pass through the trying experience of Cherith before he is ready for the triumph of Carmel. This is an unchanging principle in the ways of God. Joseph suffered the indignities of both the pit and the prison before he became governor of all Egypt, second only to the king himself. Moses spent one third of his long life at “the backside of the desert” (Exo 3:1) before JEHOVAH gave him the honour of leading His people out of the house of bondage. David had to learn the sufficiency of God’s power on the farm before he went forth and slew Goliath in the sight of the assembled armies of Israel and the Philistines. Thus it was, too, with the perfect Servant—thirty years of seclusion and silence before He began His brief public ministry. So, too, with the chief of His ambassadors—a season in the solitudes of Arabia was his apprenticeship before he became the apostle to the Gentiles.

But is there not yet another angle from which we may contemplate this seemingly strange order, “Get thee hence...hide thyself” (1Ki 17:3)? Was it not a very real and severe testing of the prophet’s submissiveness unto the divine will? “Severe,” we say, for to a robust man this request was much more exacting than his appearing before Ahab. One with a zealous disposition would find it much harder to spend three years in inactive seclusion than to be engaged in public service. This writer can testify from long and painful experience that to be removed “into a corner” (Isa 30:20) is a much severer trial than to address large congregations every night month after month. In the case of Elijah this lesson is obvious—he must learn to personally render implicit obedience unto the Lord before he was qualified to command others in His name.

Let us now take a closer look at the particular place selected by God as the one where His servant was next to sojourn, “by the brook Cherith” (1Ki 17:3). Ah, it was a brook and not a river—a brook which might dry up any moment. It is rare that God places His servants, or even His people, in the midst of luxury and abundance—to be surfeited with the things of this world only too often means the drawing away of the affections from the Giver Himself. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” (Mar 10:23). It is our hearts God requires, and very often this is put to the proof. The way in which temporal losses are borne generally makes manifest the difference between the real Christian and the worldling. The latter is utterly cast down by financial reverses and frequently commits suicide. Why? Because his all has gone and there is nothing left to live for. Contrastively, the genuine believer may be severely shaken and for a time deeply depressed, but he will recover his poise and say, “God is still my portion and I shall not want.”

Instead of a river God often gives us a brook, which may be running today and dried up tomorrow. Why? To teach us not to rest in our blessings, but in the Blessor Himself. Yet is it not at this very point that we so often fail—our hearts being far more occupied with the gifts than with the Giver? Is not this just the reason why the Lord will not trust us with a river?—because it would unconsciously take His place in our hearts. “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (Deu 32:15) And the same evil tendency exists within us, We sometimes feel that we are being harshly dealt with because God gives us a brook rather than a river, but this is because we are so little acquainted with our own hearts. God loves His own too well to place dangerous knives in the hands of infants.

And how was the prophet to subsist in such a place? Where was his food to come from? Ah, God will see after that. He will provide for his maintenance, “And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook” (1Ki 17:4). This God undertook for. Whatever may be the case with Ahab and his

idolaters, Elijah shall not perish. In the very worst of times God will show Himself strong on the behalf of His own. Whoever starves they shall be fed, “Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” (Isa 33:16). Yet how absurd it sounds to common sense to bid a man tarry indefinitely by a brook! Yes, but it was God who had given this order, and the divine commands are not to be argued about but obeyed. Thereby Elijah was bidden to trust God contrary to sight, to reason, to all outward appearances, to rest in the Lord Himself and wait patiently for Him.

“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1Ki 17:4). Observe the word we have placed in italics. The prophet might have preferred many another hiding place, but to Cherith he must go if he were to receive the divine supplies. As long as he tarried there, God was pledged to provide for him. How important, then, is the question, Am I in the place which God has (by His Word or providence) assigned me? If so, He will assuredly supply my every need. But if like the younger son, I turn my back upon Him and journey into the far country, then like that prodigal I shall certainly suffer want. How many a servant of God has laboured in some lowly or difficult sphere, and the dew of the Spirit was on his soul and the blessing of heaven on his ministry, when there came an invitation from some other field which seemed to offer a wider scope (and a larger salary!) and yielding to the temptation, the Spirit was grieved and his usefulness in God’s kingdom was at an end.

The same principle applies with equal force to the rank and file of God’s people. They must be “in the way” (Gen 24:27) of God’s appointing if they are to receive divine supplies. “Thy will be done” (Mat 6:10) precedes “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mat 6:11). How many professing Christians have we personally known who resided in a town where God sent one of His own qualified servants, who fed them with “the finest of the wheat” and their souls prospered. Then came a tempting business offer from some distant place, which would improve their position in the world. The offer is accepted, their tent was removed, only to enter a spiritual wilderness where there was no edifying ministry available. In consequence their souls were starved, their testimony for Christ ruined, and a period of fruitless backsliding ensued. As Israel had to follow the cloud of old in order to obtain supplies of manna, so must we be in the place of God’s ordering if our souls are to be watered and our spiritual lives prospered.

Let us next view the instruments selected by God to minister unto the bodily needs of His servant. “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee” (1Ki 17:4). Various lines of thought are hereby suggested. First, see here both the high sovereignty and the absolute supremacy of God—His sovereignty in the choice made, His supremacy in His power to make it good. He is a law unto Himself: “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). He prohibited His people from eating ravens, classifying them among the unclean, yea, to be “an abomination” to them (Lev 11:15; Deu 14:14). Yet He Himself made use of them to carry food unto His servant. How different are God’s ways from ours! He employed Pharaoh’s own daughter to succour the infant Moses and a Balaam to utter one of His most remarkable prophecies. He used the jaw bone of an ass in the hand of Samson to slay the Philistines, and a sling and stone to vanquish their champion.

“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee” (1Ki 17:4). O what a God is ours! The fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, the wild beasts of the field, yea, the very winds and waves obey Him. Yes, “Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power....Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls [yes, and the ravens, too]: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to

give drink to my people” (Isa 43:16 20). Thus the Lord caused birds of prey, which lived on carrion, to feed the prophet.

But let us also admire here the wisdom as well as the power of God. Elijah’s fare was provided for partly in a natural and partly in a supernatural way. There was water in the brook, so he could easily go and fetch it. God will work no miracles to spare a man trouble, or that he should be listless and lazy, making no effort to procure his own sustenance. But there was no food in the desert—how is he to get that? God will furnish this in a miraculous manner. “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee” (1Ki 17:4). Had human beings been used to take him food, they might have divulged his hiding place. Had a dog or some domestic animal gone each morning and evening, people might have seen this regular journeying to and fro, carrying food, and so been curious, and investigated the same. But birds flying with flesh into the desert would arouse no suspicion. It would be concluded they were taking it to their young. See, then, how careful God is of His people, how judicious in the arrangements He makes for them. He knows what would endanger their safety and provides accordingly.

“Hide thyself by the brook Cherith...I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1Ki 17:3-4). Go immediately, without entertaining any doubts, without making any hesitation. However contrary to their natural instincts, these birds of prey shall obey the divine behest. Nor need this appear the least unlikely. God Himself created them, gave them their peculiar instinct, and He knows how to direct and control the same. He has power to suspend or check it, according to His good pleasure. Nature is exactly what God made it, and entirely dependent upon Him for its continuance. He upholds all things by the word of His power. In Him and by Him the birds and beasts, as well as man, live, move, and have their being, and therefore He can whenever He thinks fit, either suspend or alter the law which He has imposed upon any of His creatures. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead” (Act 26:8)!

There in his lowly retreat the prophet was called upon to sojourn many days, yet not without a precious promise guaranteeing his sustenance—the supplying him with needed provision was divinely assured him. The Lord would take care of His servant while hid from public view, and would daily feed him by His miracle working power. Nevertheless, it was a real testing of Elijah’s faith. Whoever heard of such instruments being employed—birds of prey bringing food in a time of famine! Could the ravens be depended upon? Was it not far more likely that they would devour the food themselves than bring it to the prophet? Ah, his trust was not to be in the birds, but in the sure word of Him that cannot lie, “I have commanded the ravens” (1Ki 17:4). It was the Creator and not the creature, the Lord Himself and not the instruments, Elijah’s heart was to be fixed upon. How blessed to be lifted above “circumstances” and in the inerrent promise of God have a sure proof of His care.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN’S IMPOTENCY**

### *3. Its Nature*

The doctrine we are now considering is a most solemn and forbidding one. Certainly it is one which could never have been invented by man, for it is far too humbling and distasteful. It is one which is most offensive to human pride, and at complete variance with the modern idea of the progress of the human race. Nevertheless, if we accept the Scriptures as a divine revelation then

we have no choice in the matter but to uncomplainingly receive this truth. The ruined and helpless state of the sinner is fully testified to by the Bible. Therein fallen man is represented as so utterly carnal and sold under sin as to be not only “without strength” (Rom 5:6), but as lacking the least inclination to move toward God. Very dark indeed is this side of the truth, but its supplement is the glory of God in rich grace, for it furnishes a real but necessary background to the blessed contents of the Gospel.

In the Scriptures it is plainly taught that man is a fallen being, that he is lost (Luk 19:10), that he cannot recover himself from his ruin—that despite the fact of an all sufficient Saviour presented to sinners, none of them can avail themselves of Him until they be divinely regenerated (Joh 3:3, 5). Thus it is quite evident that if any sinner be saved, he owes his salvation entirely to the free grace and effectual power of God, and not in anyway unto any good in or from or by himself. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy” (Psa 115:1) is the unqualified acknowledgement of all the redeemed. Scripture speaks in no uncertain language on this point. If one man differs from another on this all important matter of being saved, then it is God who has made him to differ (1Co 4:7) and not himself.

Nor is the sinner’s salvation to be in anyway attributed to either pliability of heart or to his diligence in the use of means. “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” and “Hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy” (Rom 9:16, 18). If the reader will consult the context of John 6:44, he will find that our Lord was there accounting for the enmity of the murmuring Jews, saying, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” By those words Christ intimated that, considering what fallen human nature is, the conduct of His enemies is not to be wondered at, that they acted no different than will all other men when left to themselves. His own disciples would never have obeyed and followed Him had not a gracious divine influence been exercised upon them, which was not granted unto their fellow creatures.

But as soon as this flesh withering truth be pressed upon the unregenerate, they at once raise an outcry and voice their objections against it. If the spiritual condition of fallen man be one of complete helplessness, then with what sincerity can the Gospel bid him turn from his sins and flee to Christ for refuge? If the natural man be unable to repent and believe the Gospel, then how can he be justly punished for his impenitence and unbelief? On what ground can man be blamed for not doing what is morally impossible? Notwithstanding these difficulties, the point of doctrine which we shall insist upon is that none are able to comply with the terms of the Gospel until they are made the subjects of the special and effectual grace of God, that is, until they are divinely quickened, made willing in the day of His power, so that they actually do comply with its terms.

Nevertheless, we shall also endeavour to show that sinners are not unjustly condemned for their depravity, but that their inability is a criminal one. Great care needs to be taken in stating this doctrine accurately, or otherwise men will be encouraged to put it to an evil use, making it a comfortable resting-place for their corrupt hearts. By a misrepresentation of it more than one preacher has “sewn pillows to all armholes” thereby “strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way” (see Eze 13:18, 22). The truth of man’s spiritual impotency has been so distorted that many sinners have been made to feel they are to be pitied, and to imagine they are sincere in desiring a new heart—which has not yet been granted them. While excusing their helplessness many suppose this to be quite consistent with a genuine longing to be renewed. It is the bounden duty of the minister to make his hearers realize they are under no inability save the excuseless corruption of their own hearts.

It will therefore be apparent that there is a real need for us to inquire closely into the precise nature of man's spiritual inability, as to why it is he cannot come unto Christ unless he be divinely drawn. But before commencing this task we will notice some of the efforts made by others therein, those who have erred thereon, repudiating or perverting the truth. Theologians have divided these errorists into two main classes—Pelagians and Semipelagians—Pelagius (354-418) being the principal opponent of the godly Augustine in the fifth century. Romanists, the more extreme "Holiness" sects, and the Salvation Army are Pelagians in their teaching respecting the effects of the fall and the nature of human depravity.

Archibald A. Hodge (1823-1886) in his "Outlines of Theology" has succinctly summarized the Pelagian dogmas on the subject of man's ability to fulfil the law of God. (1) Moral character can be predicated only of volitions. (2) Ability is always the measure of responsibility. (3) Hence every man has always plenary power to do all that it is his duty to do. (4) Hence the human will alone, to the exclusion of the interference of any internal influence from God, must decide human character and destiny. The only divine influence needed by man or consistent with his character as a self determined agent is an external, providential, and educational one.

So, too, Semipelagians. (1) Man's nature has been so far weakened by the fall that it cannot act aright in spiritual matters without divine assistance. (2) This weakened moral state which infants inherit from their parents is the cause of sin, but not itself sin in the sense of deserving the wrath of God. (3) Man must strive to do his whole duty, when God meets him with co-operative grace, and renders his efforts successful. (4) Man is not responsible for the sins he commits until after he has enjoyed and abused the influences of grace.

Arminians are Semipelagians, many of them going the whole length of the Romish error in affirming the freedom unto good of fallen man's will. But their principal contention may fairly be stated thus—Man has certainly suffered considerably from the fall, so much so that sinners are unable to do much, if anything, toward their salvation, merely of themselves. Nevertheless, say the Arminians, sinners are able, by the help of common grace (supposed to be extended by the Spirit to all who hear the Gospel) to do those things which are regarded as fulfilling the preliminary conditions of salvation (such as acknowledging their sins and calling upon God for help to forsake them and turn unto Christ). And it is further affirmed that if sinners will thus pray, use the means of grace, and put forth what power they do have, then assuredly God will meet them half way and renew their hearts and pardon their iniquities.

Against this Arminian parody it is to be objected. First, that so far from the Scriptures representing man as being partially disabled by the fall, it declares him to be completely ruined—not merely weakened, but "without strength" (Rom 5:6). Second, to affirm that the natural man has any aspiration after God, is to deny he is totally depraved or that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5, cf. 8:21), for "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom 3:11). Third, if it were true that God could not justly condemn sinners for their inability to comply with the terms of the Gospel, and that in order to give every man a "fair chance" to be saved He extends to all the common help of His Spirit, that would not be "grace," but a debt which He owed to His creatures. Finally, if such a God insulting principle were granted, then the conclusion would inevitably follow that those who took advantage of this "common grace" could lawfully boast that they made themselves to differ from those who did not.

But enough of these wretched shifts and subterfuges of the carnal mind. Let us now turn to God's own Word and see what it teaches us concerning the nature of man's spiritual impotency. First, it represents it as being a penal one, a judicial infliction from the righteous Judge of all the

earth. Unless this be clearly grasped at the outset we are left without any adequate explanation of this dark mystery. God did not create man as he now is. God made man holy and upright, and by his own apostasy he became corrupt and wicked. The Creator originally endowed man with certain powers, placed him on probation, and prescribed to him a rule of conduct. Had our first parents preserved their integrity, had they remained in loving and loyal subjection to their Maker and Ruler, all had been well, not only for themselves, but also for their posterity. But they were not willing to remain in the place of subjection. They took the reins into their own hands, rebelling against their Governor, and dreadful was the outcome.

How greatly was the sin of man aggravated. It was committed against knowledge, and through the beneficence of the One against whom it was directed, under great advantages. It was committed against divine warning, and against an explicit declaration of the consequence of his transgression. In Adam's fearful offense there was unbelief, presumption, base ingratitude, fearful rebellion against his most righteous and gracious Maker. Let the dreadfulness of this first human sin be carefully weighed before we are tempted to murmur against the dire consequences which attended it. Those dire consequences may all be summed up in that one fearful word "death," for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23)—the full import of which can best be ascertained by considering all the evil effects which have since befallen man. A just, holy, and sin-hating God caused the punishment to fit the crime.

Now let it be carefully understood that when God placed Adam upon probation it pleased Him to place the whole human race on probation, for Adam's posterity were not only in him seminally as their natural head, but they were also in him legally and morally as their legal and moral head. In other words, by divine constitution and covenant Adam stood and acted as the federal representative of the whole human race. Consequently, when he sinned, we sinned; when he fell, we fell. God justly imputed Adam's transgression to all his descendants, whose agent he was, "By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Rom 5:18). By his sin Adam became not only guilty but corrupt and that defilement of nature is transmitted to all his children. "Adam's sin corrupted man's nature and leavened the whole lump of mankind. We putrefied in Adam as our root. The root was poisoned and so the branches were envenomed" (Thomas Boston, 1676-1732).

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). Let us repeat, that Adam was not only the father, but the federal representative of his posterity, consequently justice required that they should be dealt with as sharing in his guilt, and therefore that the same punishment should be inflicted upon them, which is exactly what this vitally important passage in Romans 5:12 21 affirms. "By one man [acting on behalf of the many] sin entered [as a foreign element, as a hostile factor] into the world [the whole system over which Adam had been placed as the vicegerent of God—blasting the fair face of nature, bringing a curse upon the earth, ruining all humanity], and death by sin [as its appointed wages]; and so death passed upon [as the sentence of the righteous Judge] all men" [because all men were seminally and federally in Adam].

It needs to be carefully borne in mind that in connection with the penal infliction which came upon man at the fall, he lost no moral or spiritual faculty, but rather the power to use them aright. In Scripture, "death" (as the wages of sin) signifies not annihilation, but separation. As physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from its Maker—as Ephesians 4:18 expresses it, "alienated from the life of God." Thus, when the father said, of the prodigal, "This my son was dead" (Luk 15:24), he meant, this my son was absent from me—away in the "far country" (Luk 15:13). Hence, when, as the Substitute of His

people, Christ was receiving in their stead the wages which was due them, He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). This is why the Lake of Fire is called “the second death” (Rev 20:14), because those cast therein are “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:9).

Above we have said that all of Adam’s posterity shared in the guilt of the great transgression committed by their federal head, and that therefore the same punishment is inflicted upon them as upon him. That punishment consisted (so far as its present character is concerned) in his coming under the curse and wrath of God, the corrupting of his nature, and the mortalizing of his body. Clear proof of this is found in that inspired statement, “And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen 5:3), which is in direct antithesis from his being created “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27). That Adam’s first son was morally depraved, his conduct clearly evidenced—and that his second son was so also, the sacrifice which he brought to God fully acknowledged.

As the result of the fall, man is born into this world so totally depraved in his moral nature as to be entirely unable to do anything spiritually good or even in the slightest degree dispose himself thereto. Even under the exciting and persuasive influences of divine grace, the will of man is completely unfit to act aright in co operation with grace, until after the will itself is, by the power of God, radically and permanently renewed. The tree itself must be made good, before there is the least prospect of any good fruit being borne by it. Even after a man is regenerated, the renewed will ever continues dependent upon divine grace to energize, direct, and enable it unto the performance of anything acceptable to God, as the language of Christ clearly shows, “Without me ye can do nothing” (Joh 15:5).

But let it be clearly understood that though man has by the fall lost all power to do anything pleasing to God, yet his Maker has not lost His authority over him nor forfeited His right to require that which is due Himself. As creatures we were bound to serve God and do whatsoever He commanded, and the fact that we have, by our own folly and sin, thrown away the strength given to us, cannot and does not cancel our obligations. Has the creditor no right to demand payment for what is owed him, because the debtor has squandered his substance and is unable to pay him? If God can require of us no more than we are now able to render Him, then the more we enslave ourselves by evil habits and still further incapacitate ourselves, the less our liabilities—and so the deeper we plunge into sin, the less wicked we would become, which is a manifest absurdity.

Even though it be by Adam’s fall that we have become depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, yet the terrible fact that we are enemies to the infinitely glorious God, our Maker, renders us infinitely to blame and without the vestige of a legitimate excuse. Surely it is perfectly obvious that nothing can make it right for a creature to voluntarily rise up at enmity against One who is the sum of all excellence, infinitely worthy of our love, homage, and obedience. Thus, for man—whatever be the origin of his depravity—to be a rebel against the Governor of this world is infinitely evil and culpable. It is utterly vain for us to seek to shelter behind Adam’s offense while every sin we commit is voluntary and not compulsory—the free, spontaneous inclinations of our hearts. This being the case every mouth will be stopped and all the world stand guilty before God (Rom 3:19).

To this it may be objected that Paul himself argued that he was not personally and properly to blame for the corruptions of his heart, saying, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:17, 20). But there is no justification for so wickedly perverting the apostle’s language in that passage. If the scope of his words there be attended to, such a misuse of them is

at once ruled out of court. He was engaged in showing that divine grace and not indwelling sin was the governing principle within him—as he had affirmed in, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). So far from insinuating that he did not feel himself to be to blame, wholly to blame, for his remaining corruptions, he (in this very chapter) declares, “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14), and at the close cries as a broken hearted penitent, “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom 7:24). It is perfectly obvious that he could not have mourned for his remaining corruptions as being sinful if he had not felt himself to blame for them.

## A MUTUAL COMPLAINT

“Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle” (Job 29:2-4). If Job here refers to the temporal prosperity which he had lost, we cannot condemn him for his complaint, neither can we commend him. It is but the expression of a natural regret, which would be felt by any man who had experienced such great reverses. But there is everywhere in the expressions which he used such a strain of spirituality, that we are inclined to believe he had more reference to the condition of his heart than to his earthly affairs. His soul was depressed—he had lost the light of God’s countenance. His inward comforts were declining. His joy in the Lord was at a low ebb—this he regretted far more than anything besides.

No doubt he deplored the departure of those prosperous days when, as he words it, his roots were spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch. But much more did he bemoan that the lamp of the Lord no more shone upon his head, and the secret of God was not upon his tabernacle. As his spiritual regrets are far more instructive to us than his natural ones, we will turn all our attention to them. We may, without violence, appropriate Job’s words to ourselves, for I fear that many of us can with great propriety take up our wailing and mourn for the days of our espousals, the happy days of our first love.

First, regrets such as those expressed in our text may and ought to be very bitter. If it be the loss of spiritual things that we regret, then may we say from the bottom of our hearts, “Oh that I were as in months past” (Job 29:2). It is a great thing for a man to be near to God. It is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion and to become God’s familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light. The poor man who was always poor is scarcely poor—but he who has fallen from the summit of greatness into the depths of poverty is poor indeed. The man who has never enjoyed communion with God knows nothing of what it must be to lose it, but he who has once been pressed upon the Saviour’s bosom will mourn as long as he lives, if he is deprived of the sacred enjoyment.

The mercies which Job deplored in our text are no little ones. First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of divine preservation. He says, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me” (Job 29:2). There are days with Christians when they can see God’s hand all around them, checking them in the first approaches of sin, and setting a hedge about all their ways. Their conscience is tender, and the Spirit of God is obeyed by them. They are, therefore, kept in all their ways, the angels of God watching over them, lest they dash their

foot against a stone. But when they fall into laxity of spirit and walk at a distance from God, they are not so preserved. Though kept from final and total apostasy, yet they are not kept from very grievous sin—for, like Peter who followed afar off, they may be left to deny their Master, even with oaths and cursings. If we have lost that conscious preservation of God, which once covered us from every fiery dart, if we no longer abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and feel no longer that His truth is our shield and buckler, we have lost a joy worth worlds, and we may well-deplore it with anguish of heart.

Job had also lost divine consolation, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head, when the sun of God's love was as it were in the zenith, and cast no shadow, when he rejoiced without ceasing, and triumphed from morning to night in the God of his salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength, the joy of the Lord is Israel's excellence. It is heaven upon earth, and consequently, to lose it, is a calamity indeed. Who that has once been satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord, will be content to go into the dry and thirsty land, and live far off from God? Will he not rather cry out with David, "My soul thirsteth for God...when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psa 42:2). Surely his agonizing prayer will be, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Psa 51:12). Love to God will never be content if His face be hidden. Until the curtain be drawn aside and the King's face be seen through the lattices, the true spouse will spend her life in sighing—mourning like a dove bereaved of its mate.

Moreover, Job deplored the loss of divine illumination. "By his light," he says, "I walked through darkness" (Job 29:3), that is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity. God shed such a light upon the mysteries of providence, that where others missed their path, Job, made wise by heaven, could find it. There have been times when, to our patient faith, all things have been plain. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (Joh 7:17). But if we walk far off from God, then, straightway, even the precious truth of God is no more clear to us, and the dealings of God with us in providence appear to be like a maze. He is as wise as Solomon who walks with God, but he is a very fool who trusts his own understanding. All the wisdom that we have gathered by observation and experience will not supply us with sufficiency of common sense if we turn away from God. Israel, without consulting God, made a league with her enemies. She thought the case most plain when she entered into hasty alliance with the Gibeonites, but she was duped by cunning because she asked not counsel of the Lord. In the simplest business we shall err, if we seek not direction from the Lord. Yet where matters are most complicated, we shall walk wisely, if we wait for a voice from the Oracle and seek the good Shepherd's guidance. We may bitterly lament, therefore, if we have lost the Holy Spirit's light. If now the Lord answers us not, neither by His Word nor by His providence, if we wander alone, saying, "O that I knew where I might find him!" (Job 23:3), we are in an evil case.

Moreover Job had lost divine communion. So it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. Who shall tell to another what the secret of God is? Believing hearts know it, but they cannot frame to pronounce aright the words that could explain it, nor can they convey by language what the secret is. The Lord manifests Himself unto His people as He does not unto the world. We could not tell the love passages that there are between believers and their Lord—even when they are set to such sweet music as the Song of Solomon, carnal minds cannot discern their delights. They cannot plow with our heifer and therefore they read not our riddle. As Paul in heaven saw things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, so the believer sees things and enjoys in communion with Christ what it would not be

lawful but impossible for him to tell to carnal men. Such pearls are not for swine. The spiritual discerns all things, but he himself is discerned of no man.

Now it is a high privilege, beyond all privileges, to enter into familiar intercourse with the Most High, and the man who has once possessed it, and has lost it, has a bitterer cause for regret than if, being rich, he had lost his wealth—or being famous, he had lost esteem—or being in health, he were suddenly brought to the bed of languishing. “No loss can equal the loss of Thee, my God. No eclipse is so black as the hiding of Thy face. No storm is so fierce as the letting forth of Thine indignation. It is a grief upon grief to find that Thou are not with me as in the days of old.” Whenever, then, these regrets do exist, if men’s hearts are as they should be, they are not mere hypocritical or superficial expressions, but they express the bitterest experiences of our human existence. “Oh that I were as in months past” is no sentimental sigh, but the voice of the innermost spirit in anguish as one who has lost his firstborn.

Secondly, but let me remind you that these regrets are not inevitable—that is to say, it is not absolutely necessary that a Christian should ever feel them or be compelled to express them. It has grown to be a tradition among us, that every Christian must backslide in a measure and that growth in grace cannot be unbrokenly sustained. It is regarded by many as a law of nature that our first love must grow cold and our early zeal must necessarily decline. I do not believe it for a moment. “The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pro 4:18), and were we watchful and careful to be near to God, there is no reason why our spiritual life should not continuously make progress both in strength and beauty. There is no inherent necessity in the divine life itself compelling it to decline, for is it not written, “It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (see Joh 4:14), “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (Joh 7:38)?

Grace is a living and incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, and there is nowhere impressed upon the divine life a law of sinning and decay. If we do falter and faint in the onward path, it is our sin, and it is doubly sinful to forge excuses for it. It is not to be laid upon the back of some mysterious necessity of the new nature that it should be so, but it is brought as a charge against ourselves. Nor do outward circumstances ever furnish a justification to us if we decline in grace, for under the worst conditions believers have grown in grace—deprived of the joys of Christian fellowship and denied the comforts of the public means of grace, believers have nevertheless been known to attain to a high degree of likeness to Christ Jesus. Thrown into the midst of wicked companions and forced to hear, like righteous Lot, the filthy conversation of the ungodly, yet Christians have shone all the brighter for the surrounding darkness, and have been able to escape from a wicked and perverse generation. Certain it is that a man may be an eminent Christian and be among the poorest of the poor. Poverty need not make us depart from God. And it is equally certain that a man may be rich and for all that walk with God and be distinguished for great grace. There is no lawful position of which we may say, “It compels a man to decline in grace.”

And brethren, there is no period of our life in which it is necessary for us to go back. The young Christian, with all the strength of his animal passions, can by grace be strong and overcome the wicked one. The Christian in middle life, surrounded with the world’s cares, can prove that, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1Jo 5:4). The man immersed in business may still be baptized of the Holy Spirit. Assuredly old age offers no excuse for decline, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the LORD is upright” (Psa 92:15). No, brethren, as Christ said to His disciples, when they would feign have sent the multitude away to buy meat, “They need not depart” (Mat 14:16), so

would He say to the whole company of His people, “Ye need not depart”—there is no compulsion for decline in grace. Your sun need not stand still, your moon need not wane. If you cannot add a cubit to your spiritual stature, at any rate, it need not decrease. There are no reasons written in the book of your spiritual nature why you, as a believer, should lose fellowship with God, and if you do so, take blame and shame to yourself, but do not ascribe it to necessity. Do not gratify your corruptions by supposing that they are licensed to prevail occasionally, neither vex your graces by conceiving that they are doomed to inevitable defeat at a certain season. The spirit that is in us lusts to evil, but the Holy Spirit is able to subdue it, and will subdue it if we yield ourselves to Him.

Thirdly, the regrets expressed in our text are exceedingly common, and it is only here and there that we meet with a believer who has not cause to use them. It ought not to be so, but it is so. How grievously often will the pastor hear this among other bleating of the sheep, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me” (Job 29:2).

“What peaceful hours I then enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still;  
But they have left an aching void,  
The world can never fill.”

The commonness of this lamentation may be somewhat accounted for by the universal tendency to undervalue the present and exaggerate the excellence of the past. Have you ever noticed this in natural things? We are prone to cast a partial eye upon some imaginary “good old times.” It is gone, and therefore it was good—it is here, and therefore it is dubious. In the middle of the summer we feel that the heat is so relaxing, that a frost would be the most delightful thing conceivable—we love, we say, the bracing air of winter. We are sure it is much healthier for us. Yet usually, when winter arrives, and the extreme cold sets in, we are all most anxious for the advent of spring, and we feel that somehow or other the frost is more trying to us than the heat. I met with an illustration of this tendency the other day. I went down a steep cliff to the sea shore, and during the descent every step tried my weak knees, and I felt that going down hill was the most difficult traveling in the world. Soon I had to return from the sands, and climb the steep path again. And when I began to pant and puff with the difficult ascent, I changed my opinion, and felt that I would a great deal sooner go down than come up.

Then again, regrets may in some case arise from a holy jealousy. The Christian, in whatever state he is, feels his own imperfection much, and laments his conscious shortcomings. Looking back, he observes with joy the work of grace in his soul, and does not perhaps so readily recollect the then existing deficiencies of nature. Hence he comes to think that the past was better than the present. He is afraid of backsliding and therefore he jealously fears that he is so. He is so anxious to live nearer to God, so dissatisfied with his present attainments that he dares not believe that he advances, but fears that he has lost ground.

I know this in my own experience, for when lying sick I have frequently lamented that pain has distracted my mind and taken off my attention from the Word of God, and I have longed for those seasons of health when I could read, meditate, and study with pleasure. But now that I have risen up from the sick bed and am growing strong again, I frequently look back to the long nights and quiet days spent in my sick chamber, and think that it was better with me then than now, for now I am apt to be cumbered with much serving, and then I was shut up with God.

Many a man is really strong in Christ, but because he does not feel all the juvenile vivacity of his early days, he fears that spiritual decrepitude has come upon him. He is now far more solid

and steadfast, if not so quick and impulsive. But the good man in his holy jealousy marks most the excellence of his juvenile piety and forgets there were grave deficiencies in it. While in his present state he notes the deficiencies, and fears to hope that he possesses any excellence at all. We are poor judges of our own condition, and usually err on one side or the other. All graces may not flourish at the same time, and defalcations in one direction may be more than balanced by advantages in another. We may be deeper in humility, if we are not higher in delight. We may not glitter so much and yet there may be more gold in us. The leaf may not be so green, but the fruit may be more ripe. The way may be rougher and yet be nearer heaven. Godly anxiety, then, may be the cause of many regrets which are, nevertheless, not warranted by any serious declension.

And let me add, that very often these regrets of ours about the past are not wise. It is impossible to draw a fair comparison between the various stages of Christian experience, so as to give a judicious preference to one above another. Consider, as in a parable, the seasons of the year. There are many persons who, in the midst of the beauties of spring, say, "Ah, but how fitful is the weather. These March winds and April showers come and go by such fits and starts that nothing is to be depended upon. Give me the safer glories of summer." Yet when they feel the heat of summer and wipe the sweat from their brows, they say, "After all, with all the full-blow of beauty around us, we admire more the freshness, verdure, and variety of spring. The snowdrop and the crocus coming forth as the advance-guard of the army of flowers have a superior charm about them." Now it is idle to compare spring with summer—they differ and each has its own beauty.

We are in autumn now, and very likely instead of prizing the peculiar treasures of autumn, some will despise the peaceful Sabbath of the year, and mournfully compare yon fading leaves to funeral sermons, replete with sadness. Such will contrast summer and autumn, and exalt one above another. Now whoever shall claim precedence for any season shall have me for an opponent. They are all beautiful in their season and each excels after its kind. Even thus it is wrong to compare the early zeal of the young Christian with the mature and mellow experiences of the older believer, and make preferences. Each is beautiful according to its time. You, dear young friend, with your intense zeal, are to be commended and imitated, but very much of your fire I am afraid arises from novelty, and you are not so strong as you are earnest. Like a new born river you are swift in current, but neither deep nor broad. And you, my more advanced friend, who are much tried and buffeted, to you it is not easy to hold on your way under great inward struggles and severe depressions, but your deeper sense of weakness, your firmer grip of truth, your more intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His sufferings, your patience and steadfastness are all lovely in the eyes of God. Be thankful, each of you, for what you have, for by the grace of God you are what you are.

After making all these deductions, however, I cannot conceive that they altogether account for the prevalence of these regrets. I am afraid the fact arises from the sad truth that many of us have seriously deteriorated in grace, have decayed in spirit, and degenerated in heart. Alas! in many cases old corruptions have fought desperately, and for awhile caused partial relapse, grace has become weak and sin has seized the occasion for attack. So that for a time the battle is turned and Israel's banner is trailed in the mire. With many professors, I am afraid, prayer is neglected, worldliness is uppermost, sin has come to the front, nature leads the van, and grace and holiness are in the background. It should not be so, but I am afraid, sadly afraid, it is so.

Fourth, since these regrets are exceedingly common, it is to be feared that in some cases they are very sadly needful. Now let the blast of the winnowing fan be felt through the congregation. Behold the Lord Himself winnows this heap. Are there not many among us who once walked

humbly with God and near to Him, who have fallen into carnal security? Have we not taken it for granted that all is well with us and are we not settled upon our lees like Moab of old? How little of heart-searching and self-examination are practiced these days! How little inquiry as to whether the root of the matter is really in us! Woe unto those who take their safety for granted, sit down in God's house and say, "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD are we" (see Jer 7:4). Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion. Of all enemies, one of the most to be dreaded is presumption. To be secure in Christ is a blessing—to be secure in ourselves is a curse. Where carnal security reigns, the Spirit of God withdraws. He is seen with the humble and contrite, but He is not with the proud and self-sufficient.—Charles H. Spurgeon, 1871. (Completed in the June Issue).

## STRANGE FIRE

How much "strange fire" there is in the religious world today, far more so than is generally realized. Fire which has not been authorized by God. Fire which has not been kindled by a coal from off His altar. Fire which is not sustained by the oil of the Spirit. And therefore is it "strange fire." It is the energy of the flesh turned into a religious channel. The same energy which moves the enthusiastic amateur-politician to seek votes for his party, only directed to another end. It is the expenditure of earnest zeal, yet a zeal which is not according to knowledge. It is the enthusiasm of youth, prompting them to run without being divinely sent. It is the engaging in "Christian service" to which God has not called them, for they have no "Thus saith the Lord" to warrant them.

When we turn to the Holy Scriptures, we are at once struck by the vivid contrast between that which was ordained of God and that which now obtains so widely in Christendom. Those who are familiar with the contents of the Pentateuch must be impressed with the fullness of instruction which was given to Moses for the ordering of divine worship and service in Israel. Nothing was unprovided for, nothing was left to the choice of the people. The Lord Himself made known His will and gave commandment accordingly. He appointed those who were to serve, He specified their particular duties, He endowed with wisdom for special tasks. Down to the minutest detail everything was to be carried out as God had bidden. None were to obtrude themselves into any sacred office. None were to usurp authority. None were to undertake duties assigned unto others. Nothing less than death awaited those who dared to introduce confusion into the divine arrangements.

"Thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" (Num 1:50-51). Most definite was this divine injunction, and all who belonged unto the other tribes must submit thereto, or suffer God's unsparing judgment. No matter how spiritual, how zealous, how devoted to the glory of God, none but the Levites were allowed to have any part in conducting the services of the tabernacle.

This divine prescription and proscription was repeated again and again. "Thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh

shall be put to death” (Num 3:10 and see v. 38). “That no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD” (Num 16:40). “Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Num 18:22-23). Nothing could be plainer—all those pertaining not to the divinely-ordained tribe of Levi were strictly prohibited and debarred from taking any part in the services of God’s house. Yet express as these orders were, some in Israel dared to defy the Lord, and in consequence, they paid for their rashness with their lives.

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev 10:1-2). Mark it well that these men were of the tribe of Levi, yet they took upon themselves that which the Lord had not commanded. They “offered strange fire before the LORD,” that is, fire which He had not appointed (cf. Exo 31:9), and therefore they were slain before Him. On another occasion, we find there was a group in Israel “two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown” (Num 16:2) led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who strongly resented the divinely-appointed restriction. “They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (Num 16:3). The sequel was solemn. (Num 16:31-32).

God is very jealous of His appointments and will not suffer them to be defied with impunity. He had given express commandment that, “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God” (1Ch 15:2). But this was ignored by David, for “They set the ark of God upon a new cart...and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart” (2Sa 6:3). “And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error” (2Sa 6:6-7). Later, David owned his fault, saying to the priests, “The LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order” (1Ch 15:13). (Completed in the June Issue).



# June

## **GODLY SORROW**

It is by carefully noting the contrasts pointed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures that we learn to distinguish between things that radically differ. Sometimes these contrasts are implied by a qualifying term, at other times they are more expressly stated. Thus we read of “faith which worketh by love” (Gal 5:6), a disinterested faith, that springs from a spiritual affection, which is in contrast from a self-seeking faith that proceeds from the flesh. Romans 5:5 tells of a hope that “maketh not ashamed,” which is the opposite of the hypocrite’s hope that “shall perish” (Job 8:13). Another discriminating expression is “love unfeigned” (2Co 6:6; 1Pe 1:22), which denotes there is a fictitious love, such as was displayed by Judas when he betrayed the Saviour with a kiss. In like manner the apostle speaks of the Corinthian saints being “made sorry after a godly manner” (2Co 7:9), which suggests there is a mourning over sin that has its roots in nothing higher than mere nature.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2Co 7:10). Here the contrast implied in the former verse is definitely stated, “godly sorrow” being placed over against the “sorrow of the world.” Before we consider the latter, let us offer a few more remarks upon the former. Last month we pointed out that this “godly sorrow” is such a one as is required by the thrice holy God, which He produces, and which leads the soul to Him. Godly sorrow, then, is the badge of all the heirs of heaven and God Himself produces it in the hearts of His people. It needs to be pointed out that He uses means in bringing it to pass—means suited to employ with moral agents, for so far from treating with us as stocks and stones, He ever draws with the “cords of a man” (Hos 11:4).

First, “godly sorrow” (2Co 7:10) issues from a broken and contrite heart, which is something that no man possesses by nature. On the contrary, the heart of the unregenerate is like “the nether millstone.” A miracle of grace has to be wrought before “a heart of flesh” is imparted. This is accomplished by means of the Word, under the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit. “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer 23:29). That speaks of a humbling and painful experience—the travail preceding the birth. Every genuine conversion is one in which the Word is received “in much affliction” (1Th 1:6). That “affliction” is caused by the truth enabling the soul to view sin as God sees it—its true nature, its heinousness, its infinite ill-desert. As sin is viewed in God’s light, the soul is overwhelmed with sorrow and shame for having offended against the divine Majesty, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned” (Psa 51:4). An illustration of this is found in Acts 2. Under the faithful preaching of Peter, applied by the power of the Spirit, his hearers were “pricked in their heart” and said, “What shall we do?” (Act 2:37).

Second, “godly sorrow” (2Co 7:10) issues from spiritual considerations. As the Spirit applies the truth to the conscience and understanding, the soul is brought under the power of due

apprehensions of God's perfections and of his relation to Him. Horror and grief fill the heart when there is the recognition that a gracious God has been offended, a righteous law violated, a precious Christ dishonoured, the Holy Spirit grieved. This it is which overwhelms the soul with shame and bows it into the dust. This it is which causes the renewed to be "pricked in their heart"—the realization that they have displeased Him whose favour they account more than life. Therefore when it is said, "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom 2:4), it means not only that it is His gracious operations that produce the repentance, but also that it is the heart's piercing consciousness of having sinned against such goodness that results in a radical reformation of our ways: David and Manasseh, Peter and Paul are examples of those possessed of godly sorrow.

Third, "godly sorrow" (2Co 7:10) issues from an evangelical faith. It proceeds from faith as the stream from the fountain, as the branch from the root. Proof of this is found in, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zec 12:10). All gracious mourning proceeds from evangelical repentance, from believing. Nothing breaks the heart of a sinner like trustful looking to the cross. The tears of godly sorrow ever drop from the eyes of faith. The more we are enabled to look by faith upon a pierced Christ, the more shall we mourn over our sins for having nailed Him to the tree. No one can stand under the shinings of dying Love with a frozen heart. Well did Luther ask, "What are all the palaces of the world to a contrite heart?" In the former reside the princes of the earth, in the latter dwells the Prince of peace.

This spiritual mourning for sin is evidenced by its product—"godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2Co 7:10). In this verse, "repentance" signifies reformation or walking in newness of life. Godly sorrow humbles the mind, meekens the heart, bends the will, causing the soul to turn from sin with horror and hatred thereof unto God. Unlawful imaginations and wrongful actions are unsparingly judged in the light of God's countenance, and there is a consequent turning from the paths of folly to walk in the ways of righteousness. Thus the outcome is conversion in the case of an alien sinner, restoration for a wandering saint. "Godly sorrow" is not only one that is concerned for the divine glory and is grieved where God is dishonoured, but it is also one which has a dependence upon His mercy, counting upon His pardoning grace, and therefore does it humbly but trustfully plead such a promise as, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9).

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2Co 7:10). This last clause, "not to be repented of," tells of the durability of that which issues from this spiritual mourning, and as no effect can be greater than its cause it announces the lastingness of "godly sorrow." It is a permanent grace. So long as a real Christian continues sinning, he cannot but continue grieving, "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51:3) must be the language of one with a quickened conscience. Not until he reaches heaven shall all tears be removed from the saint's eyes. Nor does any believer ever regret repenting, no matter what anguish of soul may occasion and accompany it, for it is a turning from sin—the cause of all disquietude—to our true Resting-place. The sorrow of a worldling is of short duration, but the streams of spiritual contrition last as long as sin indwells the believer.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *15. The Giving of Alms—Matthew 6:1-4*

We now enter upon the fourth division of our Lord's Sermon, a section which includes the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, the general subject of which is the performing of good works so as to secure the approbation of God. As we shall see, Christ here takes up quite a different aspect of truth, yet is it one which is closely related to what had formerly occupied His attention. There He had made it very evident that He required more from His followers than what the religion of the scribes and Pharisees produced (Mat 5:20, 47). Here He insists that a far higher quality is also absolutely necessary. There He had warned His hearers against the erroneous doctrines of the Jewish teachers, here He cautions them against their evil practices, particularly the sins of hypocrisy and worldly-mindedness.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 6:1). There is no doubt whatever in our own mind that, in this instance, the rendering of the Revised Version is to be preferred, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them,” though the R. V. rightly uses “alms” in verse 2. This first verse enunciates a general principle in reference to moral and spiritual duties, which in the succeeding verses is illustrated, amplified, and enforced in the three particular duties of alms, prayer, and fasting—it is acts of righteousness which is in view. Thus it is a case where an abstract noun is given a concrete sense. It is similarly used in Matthew 3:15 and 5:20. In all three passages it has the force of “righteousnesses” or “good works.”

In verses 2-4, the general principle laid down in the opening sentence is applied manward, Godward, and selfward, and the three duties specified have to do with our estates, our souls, and our bodies. Those three good works of alms, prayer and fasting have occupied a conspicuous place in all the leading religious systems, and have been almost universally regarded as the chief means of obtaining salvation and the clearest proofs of righteousness and sanctity. In their most serious moments, all, except the most abandoned, have been willing to practice some form and degree of self-denial, or perform acts of devotion, in the hope that they might thereby appease the great God whose wrath they feared.

In the teachings of the Koran, prayer, fasting, and alms are the chief duties required from the Mohammedan. Prayer, it is said, will carry a man half-way to Paradise, fasting will bring him to the gates, and alms will give him entrance. The great prominence which Romanism assigns to alms-giving, especially when the alms are bestowed upon herself—to the senseless repetition of prayers, and to bodily mortification, is too well-known to need any enlargement upon. Similar ideas obtain among other religions, especially in Buddhism Lamaism with its prayer-wheels being a case in point. But in our present passage, Christ shows us that, as mere formal works, these religious acts are worthless in the sight of God.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 6:1). It ought to be apparent that our Lord is not here reprehending the giving of alms as such, but rather that He is condemning that ostentatious bestowment of charity which is done for the purpose of self-advertisement. As a matter of fact, this particular admonition of the Saviour's takes it for granted that His disciples were in the habit of relieving the indigent, and this notwithstanding that most of them had to labour for their own daily bread. That against which Christ warned was the giving of unnecessary publicity in the discharge of this duty and the making the praise of men our ultimate object therein. Most

flagrantly did the Pharisees err at this very point. Edersheim (Alfred, 1825-1889) gives the following quotation as a specimen, "He that says, I give this 'sela' that my sons may live, and that I may merit the world to come, behold, this is the perfect righteousness."

To show pity unto the afflicted is but common humanity. It is a great mistake to suppose that the exercise of beneficence is something peculiar to this Christian era. Under the legal economy God commanded His people, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deu 15:7-8). "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee" (Lev 25:35). Job declared, "I was a father to the poor" (Job 29:16). Said the psalmist, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psa 41:1).

"He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Pro 14:21)—there was the fullest room for the exercise of mercy under the Mosaic dispensation. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Pro 19:17). Yes, for the poor, equally with the rich, are His creatures, and the Lord will be no man's debtor. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Pro 21:13). We need hardly say that the principle of this verse is still in operation. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Pro 28:27). At a time of great spiritual declension in Israel, JEHOVAH brought against them the following charges, "They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes....For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right" (Amo 2:6 and 5:12).

It is therefore a most un-Christian attitude to argue, We have enough to do to provide for our own families. It is for the rich and not for the labouring people to give alms. If the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts we shall feel for the afflicted, and according to our ability shall be ready to relieve the needy, especially such as belong to the household of faith. Yea, if a situation requires it, shall gladly deny ourselves comforts so as to do more for those in want. And let us not overlook the fact that Christ here designates almsgiving as "righteousness." The apostle struck the same note when he pressed Psalm 112:9 on his hearers, "As it is written, he hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever" (2Co 9:9). Those who refuse to give unto the poor are guilty of a gross injustice, for inasmuch as they are but stewards over what they possess, they rob the needy of their due.

Thus by making alms an essential branch of practical righteousness, our Lord teaches us that the succouring of the poor is not a work of freedom, left to our own choice, but something which is enjoined upon us by divine commandment. So far from the matter of providing for the needy being left to our own option, it is one of bare justice, and failure therein is a grievous breach both of the law of God and of nature. But the giving of alms to the poor is not only an act of righteousness, it is also the exercise of kindness. The Greek word, which is here rendered "alms," is derived from a root which signifies to have compassion or to be merciful. This takes us behind the act itself to the spirit which prompts it. It is not the mere bestowment of goods or money which constitutes "alms," but the merciful and pitiful heart of the giver.

From what has just been pointed out we may also discover who are the ones entitled to be relieved—the kind of persons whom we may rightfully bestow alms upon, for we are not to act blindly in this matter. It is those who are in such a condition as to really draw out our pity—such

as orphans and elderly widows, the maimed, the sick, and the blind. If this principle be duly heeded, we shall be guarded against indiscriminate giving, which often does a great deal more harm than good—encouraging idleness and intemperance. Obviously, healthy and robust beggars who would trade upon the generosity of others are not entitled to receive alms, “This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2Th 3:10). Thus, in abetting the indolent we are partners with those who defy divine authority.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” (Mat 6:1). This admonition is for the avoidance of an unlawful manner of giving alms, for even a good deed may be done in an ill way. Alas, so very deceitful and desperately wicked are our hearts that our most beneficent actions may proceed from corrupt desires and thereby be rendered not only void, but evil in the sight of Him with whom we have to do. Christ’s “take heed” here intimates we are in great danger of erring at this very point. Acts of charity are specially offensive in the sight of our gracious God when they are performed from a desire to procure for ourselves a reputation of sanctity or generosity among our fellows. Alas, how much of this obnoxious pride, this vaunting of charity is there today both in the religious world and the secular!

That against which Christ here warns His disciples is the secret pride of their hearts. This pride is twofold—of the mind and will, and of the affections. Pride of mind is a corrupt disposition whereby a man thinks more highly of himself than he ought to do—this was the sin of the Pharisees and of the Laodiceans (Rev 3:16). This conceit is most dangerous, especially in the matter of saving grace, for it has caused multitudes to deceive themselves by imagining they had been born again, when in fact they were dead in trespasses and sins, and moving real Christians to imagine they possess more grace than they actually do. Pride of will is an inward affection which makes a man discontented with the estate in which God has placed him, leading him to hanker after a better. This was the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:5-6).

Now from these corrupt principles of pride of mind and pride of will issue that exercise or practice of pride in a man’s life whereby he is determined to do whatever he can which will promote his own praise and glory. Such pride is not something which is peculiar to a few people only, but is found in every man by nature—the Lord Jesus alone excepted. And where this pride is not mortified and is not held in leash by God, it is so strong that it will not be crossed at any price, for rather than have his proud will thwarted, a person will commit any sin, as Pharaoh when he asked, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” (Exo 5:2); as Absalom, who was responsible for the banishing of his father from his own kingdom; and as Ahithophel, who went and hanged himself when his counsel was rejected. It was just such pride as this which occasioned the fall of Satan himself (Isa 14:12-14; 1Ti 3:6).

Therefore, “take heed,” says Christ. Take every possible precaution to guard against this sin. How? First, by unsparing self-examination. The more careful we are to know the pride of our hearts, the less likely are we to be deceived by it. Second, by sincere self-condemnation, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1Co 11:31). If we would humble ourselves before God, we must hate ourselves for our wicked pride and penitently confess it to Him. Third, by reminding ourselves of the judgments of God upon this sin. Herod was eaten up of worms because he took unto himself the glory due unto God (Act 12:23). “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1Pe 5:5). Fourth, by meditating upon the fearful sufferings of Christ in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. Nothing will more effectually humble my proud heart than the realization that it was my very sins which occasioned the death of God’s Lamb.

“Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (Mat 6:1). The value of an action is determined by the principle from which it proceeds. To give to the poor simply because

it is customary, is merely the imitation of others. To minister unto the needy in order to increase our own influence and power, is a display of carnal ambition. To give so as to advance worldly interests is a manifestation of covetousness; if to seek applause, it is to gratify pride; if to alleviate the sufferings of my fellows, it is only the exercise of common humanity. But if I minister unto the needy out of a respect to the divine authority and with the desire of pleasing God, acting from regard for His will, to which I long to be conformed in all things, then it is a spiritual act and acceptable unto the Lord. (Condensed from John Brown, 1784-1858).

“Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Mat 6:2). “Do not sound a trumpet” is a figurative way of saying, seek not to attract the attention of other people unto thyself. The word “hypocrite” is a significant one, for it properly denotes an actor who wears a mask, playing his part behind it. The Pharisees posed as being most devout worshippers of God and lovers of their fellow men, when in reality they were self-righteous and sought only the applause of men. Behind the outward appearance of piety and generosity, they were the slaves of worldly and selfish passions. They performed their deeds of charity where the largest number of onlookers congregated together. Their “reward” was the admiration of shallow-minded men, as “dust” is the serpent’s meat.

The sin which Christ here reprehended is far more grievous than is commonly supposed, and we may add, far more prevalent, many of the Lord’s own people being guilty of it. It consists of making men, rather than God, the judges and approvers of their actions. And do not we often fall into this snare? When we do that which is right, and yet incur thereby the displeasure of our fellows, are we not more grieved than when by sin we offend God Himself? If so, does not that clearly prove that our hearts have more regard to the censure of men than of the Lord? Are we not deeply hurt when men criticize and condemn our conduct, and do we not rejoice when they praise us? Are we equally hurt when our fellows dishonour God? Are we more afraid of offending mortal man than the everlasting God? When in sore straits, which comforts us more—the assurances of earthly friends to relieve us or the promises of the Lord?

“But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Mat 6:3). This divine precept is designed to restrain the corrupt ambition of our hearts after the praise of men. It goes much further than the commandment in verse 2. There the Lord had forbidden that ostentatious giving of alms which is done for the purpose of self-advertisement and the procuring of the applause of our fellows. While here He prohibits any self-satisfaction or complacency in the performing of this good work. It is strange how the commentators see in verse 3 nothing more than the repetition of that which is found in verse 2, quite missing the force of, “Let not thy left hand know [approve of] what thy right hand doeth” (Mat 6:3). We are to give alms in simplicity, with the sole intent and desire of pleasing God only. When a good work has been done, we should dismiss it from our minds and not congratulate ourselves upon it, and press on to what is yet before us.

“That thine alms may be in secret” (Mat 6:4). Here is still another instance where the language of Christ in this discourse must not be taken literally and absolutely, or otherwise any act of mercy which came under the cognizance of our fellows would be thereby prohibited. Certainly the primitive Christians did not always conceal their donations, as is clear from Acts 11:29-30. Secrecy itself may become a cloak to avarice, and under the pretence of hiding good works we may hoard up our money to spend upon ourselves. There are times when a person of prominence may rightly excite his backward brethren by his own example of liberality. So we must not understand Christ as here forbidding all charitable actions which may be seen by others, but rather

understand Him to mean that we should perform them as unobtrusively as possible, making it our chief concern to aim at the approbation of God therein.

“That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:4). Though there be nothing meritorious about our best performances, yea, though everything we do is defiled, nevertheless, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10). Nevertheless, it must be a work of faith—for “without faith it is impossible to please him”—and a labour of love, if it is to receive God’s commendation. In the divine administration it is so ordered that, in the end, the selfish person is disappointed, while he who seeks the good of others is himself the gainer. The more we truly aim at our Father’s approbation, the less shall we be concerned about either the praise or contempt of the world. The divine reward, in the day to come, will be given “openly,” before an assembled universe. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1Co 4:5).

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### *6. By the Brook*

“Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1Ki 17:3-4). Notice well the order here—first the divine command and then the precious promise. Elijah must comply with the divine behest if he were to be supernaturally fed. As we so often point out in these pages, most of God’s promises are conditional ones. And does not this explain why many of us do not extract the good of them, because we fail to comply with their stipulations. God will not put a premium on either unbelief or disobedience. Alas, we are our own worst enemies and lose much by our perversity. We sought to show last month that the arrangement here made by God displayed His high sovereignty, His all-sufficient power, and His blessed wisdom—as it also made a demand upon the prophet’s submissiveness and faith. We turn now to the sequel.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (1Ki 17:5). Not only did God’s injunction to Elijah supply a real test of his submission and faith, but it also made a severe demand upon his humility. Had pride been in the ascendant he would have said, Why should I follow such a course? it would be playing the coward’s part to “hide” myself. I am not afraid of Ahab, so I shall not go into seclusion. Ah, my reader, some of God’s commands are quite humiliating to haughty flesh and blood. It may not have struck His disciples as a very policy to pursue when Christ bade them, “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Mat 10:23). Nevertheless, such were His orders and He must be obeyed. And why should any servant of His demur at such a command as “hide thyself,” when of the Master Himself we read that “Jesus hid himself” (Joh 8:59). Ah, He has left us an example in all things.

Furthermore, compliance with the divine command would be quite a quite a tax on the social side of Elijah’s nature. There are few who can endure solitude—to be cut off from their fellows

would indeed prove a severe trial to most people. Unconverted men cannot live without company. The sociability of those like-minded is necessary if they are to silence an uneasy conscience and banish troublesome thoughts. And is it much different with the great majority even of professing Christians? Alas, soul-satisfying, heart-ravishing communion with God, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, delighting themselves in the Lord, is an experience they seem to be little acquainted with. “Lo, I am with you alway” (Mat 28:20) has little real meaning to most of us. How different the contentment, joy, and usefulness of Bunyan in prison and Madame Guyon in her solitary confinement. Ah, Elijah might be cut off from his fellows, but not from the Lord Himself.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD” (1Ki 17:5). Without hesitation or delay the prophet complied with God’s command. Blessed subjection to the divine will was this. To deliver JEHOVAH’s message unto the king himself, or to be dependent upon ravens, he was equally ready. However unreasonable the precept might appear or however unpleasant the prospect, the Tishbite promptly carried it out. How different was this from the prophet Jonah, who fled from the word of the Lord. Yes, and how different the sequel—the one imprisoned for three days and nights in the whale’s belly, the other, at the end, taken to heaven without passing through the portals of death! Even God’s servants are not all alike, either in faith, obedience, or fruitfulness. O that all of us may be as prompt in our obedience to the Lord’s Word as Elijah was.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD” (1Ki 17:5). The prophet neither delayed in complying with the divine directions nor did he doubt that God would supply all his need. Happy it is when we can obey Him in difficult circumstances and trust Him in the dark. But why should we not place implicit confidence in God and rely upon His word of promise? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Has His word of promise ever failed? Then let us not entertain any unbelieving suspicions of His future care of us. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not so His promises. God’s dealings with Elijah have been recorded for our instruction. O that they may speak loudly to our hearts, rebuking our wicked distrust and moving us to cry in earnest, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luk 17:5). The God of Elijah still lives and fails none who count upon His faithfulness.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD” (1Ki 17:5). Elijah not only preached God’s Word, but he practiced it. This is the crying need of our times. There is a great deal of talking, but very little of walking according to the divine precepts. There is much activity in the religious realm, but only too often it is unauthorized by and in numerous instances is contrary to the divine statutes. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam 1:22) is the un failing requirement of Him with whom we have to do. To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous” (1Jo 3:7). Alas, how many are deceived at this very point. They prate about righteousness, but fail to practice it. “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 7:21).

“And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook” (1Ki 17:6). What proof was this that, “He is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23). All nature shall change her course rather than one of His promises fail. O what comfort is there here for trusting hearts—what God has promised, He will certainly perform. How excuseless is our unbelief, how unspeakably wicked our doubtings. How much of our distrust is the consequence of the divine promises not being sufficiently real and definite unto our minds. Do we meditate as we ought upon the promises of the Lord? If we were more fully

“acquainted” with Him (Job 22:21), if we “set him” more definitely before our hearts (see Psa 16:8), would not His promises have far more weight and power with us?

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phi 4:19). It is profitless to ask, How? The Lord has ten thousand ways of making good His Word. Some reader of this very paragraph may be living from hand to mouth, having no stock of money or store of victuals. Yea, not knowing where the next meal will come from. But if you be a child of His, God will not fail you, and if your trust be in Him, it shall not be disappointed. In some way or other, “The LORD shall provide” (see Gen 22:14). “O, fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing” (Psa 34:9-10); “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [food and clothing] shall be added unto you” (Mat 6:33). These promises are addressed to us—to encourage us to cleave unto God and do His will.

“And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening” (1Ki 17:6). Had He so pleased, the Lord could have fed Elijah by angels rather than by ravens. There was then in Israel a hospitable Obadiah, who kept a secret table in a cave for a hundred of God’s prophets (1Ki 18:4). Moreover, there were seven thousand faithful Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal, anyone of whom had doubtless deemed himself highly honoured to have sustained so eminent a one as Elijah. But God preferred to make use of fowls of the air. Why? Was it not so as to give both the Tishbite and us a signal proof of His absolute command over all creatures, and thereby of His worthiness to be trusted in the greatest extremities? And what is the more striking is that Elijah was better fed than the prophets who were sustained by Obadiah, for they had only “bread and water” (1Ki 18:4), whereas Elijah had meat also.

Though God may not employ literal ravens in ministering unto His needy servants and people today, yet He often works just as definitely and wondrously in disposing the selfish, the covetous, the hard-hearted, and the grossly immoral to render assistance to His own. He can and often does induce them contrary to their natural dispositions and miserly habits to deal kindly and liberally in ministering to our necessities. He has the hearts of all in His hand and turns them wheresoever He will (see Pro 21:1). What thanks are due unto the Lord for sending His provisions by such instruments! We doubt not that quite a number of our readers could bear similar testimony to this writer when he says, How often in the past did God in the most unlooked-for manner provide for our necessities. We had as soon expected ravens to bring us food as that we should receive from those who actually bestowed it.

“And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening” (1Ki 17:6). Observe, no vegetables, fruit, or sweets are mentioned. There were no luxuries, but simply the bare necessities. “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8). But are we? Alas, how little of this godly contentment is now seen, even among the Lord’s people. How many of them set their hearts upon the things which the godless make idols. Why are our young people dissatisfied with the standard of comfort which sufficed their parents? Why this hankering after a motor car, following the expensive fashions of the world in dress, and home furnishings? Money wasted on such things as vacuum sweepers and electric washers ought to have gone to the support of the Gospel. But God will not be mocked—view the rapidly mounting rates and taxes as a divine judgment on carnal extravagance. Self must be denied if we are to show ourselves followers of Him who had not where to lay His head.

“And he drank of the brook” (1Ki 17:6). Let us not overlook this clause, for no detail in Scripture is meaningless. Water in the brook was as truly and as definitely a provision of God’s as

the bread and meat which the ravens brought. Has not the Holy Spirit recorded this detail for the purpose of teaching us that the common mercies of providence (as we term them) are also the gifts of God. If we have been supplied with what is needful to sustain our bodies, then gratitude and acknowledgement are due our God. And yet how many there are, even among professing Christians, who sit down to their meals without first asking God's blessing, and rising up therefrom without thanking Him for what they have had. In this matter, too, Christ has left us an example, for on the occasion of His feeding the multitude, we are told that "Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed unto the disciples" (Joh 6:11). Then let us not fail to do the same.

"And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land" (1Ki 17:7). Weigh attentively those five words. "And it came to pass" means far more than it merely happened—it signifies that the divine decree concerning the same was now fulfilled. "It came to pass" in the good providence of God, who orders all things after the counsel of His own will, and without whose personal permission nothing occurs, not even the falling of a sparrow to the ground (see Mat 10:29). How this should comfort the children of God and assure them of their security. There is no such thing as chance with reference to God—wherever this term occurs in the Bible it is always in connection with man, referring to something taking place without His design. Everything which occurs in this world is just as God ordained from the beginning (Act 2:23). Endeavour to recall that fact, dear reader, the next time you are in difficulty and distress. If you are one of God's people, He has provided for every contingency in His "everlasting covenant" and His mercies are "sure" (2Sa 23:5; Isa 55:3).

"And after a while" or (margin) "at the end of days" by which expression Lightfoot (John, 1602-1675) understood "after a year," which is frequently the sense of that phrase in Scripture. However this may be after an interval of some duration the brook dried up. Krummacher (F. W., 1796-1868) declares that the very name Cherith denotes "drought," as though it usually dried up more quickly than any other brook. Most probably it was a mountain stream, which flowed down a narrow ravine. Water was supplied it by the way of nature or ordinary providence, but the course of nature was now altered. The purpose of God was accomplished and the time of the prophet's departure unto another hiding place had arrived. The drying up of the brook was a forceful reminder to Elijah of the transitoriness of everything mundane. "The fashion of this world passeth away" (1Co 7:31), and therefore "Here have we no continuing city" (Heb 13:14). Change and decay is stamped upon everything down here—there is nothing stable under the sun. We should therefore be prepared for sudden changes in our circumstances.

The ravens, as heretofore, brought the prophet flesh and bread to eat each morning and evening, but he could not subsist without water. But why should not God supply the water in a miraculous way, as He did the food? Most certainly He could have done so. He could have brought water out of the rock, as He did for Israel, and for Samson out of a jawbone (Jdg 15:18-19). Yes, but the Lord is not confined to any one method, but has a variety of ways in bringing the same end to pass. God sometimes works one way and sometimes another, employing this means today and that tomorrow, in accomplishing His counsels. God is sovereign and acts not according to rule and rote. He ever acts according to His own good pleasure, and this He does in order to display His all sufficiency, to exhibit His manifold wisdom, and to demonstrate the greatness of His power. God is not tied and if He closes one door He can easily open another.

"That the brook dried up" (1Ki 17:7). Cherith would not flow forever, no, not even for the prophet. Elijah himself must be made to feel the awfulness of that calamity which he had announced. Ah, my reader, it is no uncommon thing for God to suffer His own dear children to

become enwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. True, He makes a very real difference both in the use and the issue of their stripes, but not so in the infliction of them. We are living in a world which is under the curse of a holy God, and therefore, “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). Nor is there any escape from trouble so long as we are left in this scene. God’s own people, though the objects of His everlasting love, are not exempted for, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Psa 34:19). Why? For various reasons and with various designs—one of them being to wean our hearts from things below and cause us to set our affection on things above.

“The brook dried up” (1Ki 17:7). To outward appearance that would have seemed a real misfortune, to carnal reason an actual calamity. Let us endeavour to visualize Elijah there at Cherith. The drought was everywhere, the famine throughout the whole land, and now his own brook began to dry up. Day by day its waters gradually lessened until soon there was barely a trickle, and then it entirely ceased. Had he grown increasingly anxious and gloomy? Did he say, what shall I do? Must I stay here and perish? Has God forgotten me? Did I take a wrong step, after all, in coming here? It all depended upon how steadily his faith remained in exercise. If faith were active, then he admired the goodness of God in causing that supply of water to last so long. How much better for our souls, if instead of mourning over our losses, we praise God for continuing His mercies to us so long—especially when we bear in mind they are only lent to us and that we deserve not the least of them.

Though dwelling in the place of God’s appointing, yet Elijah is not exempted from those deep exercises of soul which are ever the necessary discipline of a life of faith. True, the ravens had, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, supplying him with food morning and evening, and the brook had flowed on its tranquil course. But faith must be tested—and developed. The servant of God must not settle down on his lees, but pass from form to form in the school of the Lord. And having learned (through grace) the difficult lessons of one, he must now go forward to grapple with others yet more difficult. Perhaps the reader may now be facing the drying brook of popularity, of failing health, of diminishing business, of decreasing friendships. Ah, a drying brook is a very real trouble.

And why does God suffer the brook to dry up? To teach us to trust in Himself and not in His gifts. As a general rule He does not for long provide for His people in the same way and by the same means, lest they should rest in them and expect help from them. Sooner or later God shows us how dependent we are upon Himself even for supplies of everyday mercies. But the heart of the prophet must be tested, to show whether his trust was in Cherith or in the living God. So it is in His dealings with us. How often we think we are trusting in the Lord, when really we are resting on comfortable circumstances, and when they become uncomfortable, how much faith have we!?

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN’S IMPOTENCY**

### *3. Its Nature*

Man’s spiritual impotency is a moral one, by which we mean that he is now unable to meet the requirements of the Moral Law. We employ this term “moral,” first of all, in contrast from “natural,” for the spiritual helplessness of fallen man is unnatural, inasmuch as it pertained not to

the nature of man as created by God. Man (in Adam) was endowed with full ability to do whatever was required of him, but that ability he lost by the Fall. We employ this term “moral,” in the second place, because it accurately defines the character of fallen man’s malady. His inability is purely moral, because while he still possesses all moral as well as intellectual faculties requisite for right action, yet the moral state of his faculties is such as to render right action impossible. “Its essence is in the inability of the soul to know, love, or choose spiritual good, and its ground exists in that moral corruption of soul whereby it is blind, insensible, and totally averse to all that is spiritually good” (Archibald A. Hodge, 1823-1886).

The affirmation that fallen man is morally impotent presents a serious difficulty unto many. They suppose that to assert his inability to will or do anything spiritually good is utterly incompatible with human responsibility or the sinner’s guilt. These difficulties are to be considered by us at length (D.V.) later. But it was necessary for us to allude unto these difficulties at the present stage because their efforts to show the reconcilability of fallen man’s inability with his responsibility has led not a few defenders of the former truth to make predications which were unwarrantable and untrue. They felt that there is, there must be, some sense or respect in which even fallen man may be said to be able to will and do what is required of him, and they have laboured to show in what sense this ability exists, while at the same time man is, in another sense, unable.

Many Calvinists supposed that in order to avoid the awful error of Antinomian fatalism it was necessary to ascribe some kind of ability unto fallen man, and therefore they resorted unto the distinction between natural and moral inability. Affirming that though man is now morally unable to do what God requires, yet he has a natural ability to do it, and therefore is responsible for the not doing of it. In the past we have ourselves made use of this distinction, and we still believe it to be a real and important one, though we are now satisfied that it is expressed faultily. There is a radical difference between a person being in possession of natural or moral faculties, and his possessing or not possessing the power to use those faculties aright, and in the accurate stating of the same lies the difference between a preservation of the doctrine of man’s depravity and moral impotence, and the repudiation or at least the whittling down thereof.

It is at this point that many have burdened their writings with a metaphysical discussion of the human will, a discussion so abstruse that comparatively few of their readers possessed the necessary education or mentality to intelligently follow it. We do not propose to now canvass such questions as, Is the will of fallen man “free”? and if so, in what sense? To introduce such an inquiry here would divert attention too much from the more important query, Can man by any efforts of his own recover himself from the effects of the Fall? Suffice it, then, to insist that the sinner’s unwillingness to come to Christ is far more than a mere negation or a not putting forth of such a volition. It is a positive thing, an active aversion from Him, a terrible and inveterate enmity against Him.

The term “ability” or “power” is not an easy one to define, for it is a relative one, having reference to something to be done or resisted. Thus when we meet with the word, the mind at once asks, power to do what? ability to resist what? The particular kind of ability necessary is determined by the particular kind of actions to be performed. If it be the lifting of a heavy weight, it is physical ability which is needed, if to work out a sum in arithmetic, mental power, if to choose between good and evil, moral power. Man has sufficient physical and intellectual ability to keep many of the precepts of the Moral Law, yet no possible expenditure of such power could produce moral obedience. It may be that Gabriel has less natural and intellectual power than

Satan. Suppose it is so, then what? Why, simply that no amount of ability can go beyond its own kind—love to God can never proceed from the powers possessed by Satan.

Let us now consider what the Scriptures teach concerning the bodily, mental, and moral abilities of fallen man. First, they teach that his bodily faculties are in a ruined state, that his physical powers are enfeebled, and this as a result of sin. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Rom 5:12). That this includes physical death, none of our readers is likely to deny. Now death necessarily implies a failure of the powers of the body. So, too, sickness, feebleness, the wasting of the physical energies and tissues are included, and all of this originates in sin as their moral cause and are the penal results of it. Every aching joint, every quivering nerve, every pang of pain we experience, is a reminder of and a mark of God’s displeasure upon the original misuse of our bodily powers in the garden of Eden.

Second, man’s intellectual powers have suffered by the Fall. “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). A very definite display of this ignorance was made by our first parents after their apostasy. Their sin consisted in allowing their affections to wander after a forbidden object, seeking their happiness not in the delightful communion of God, but in the suggestion presented to them by the tempter. Like their descendants ever since, they loved and served the creature more than the Creator. Their conduct in hiding from God showed an alienation of affections. Had their delight been in the Lord as their chief good, then desire for concealment could not have possessed their minds. That foolish attempt to hide themselves from the searching eye of God betrayed their ignorance as well as their conscious guilt. Had not “their foolish heart been darkened” such an attempt had not been made, but “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom 1:22).

This mental darkness, this ignorance of mind is to man, unaided by supernatural grace, insuperable. Fallen man never would, never could, dispel this darkness, overcome this ignorance. He labours under an imbecility of mind to such a degree as to render it impossible for him to attain unto the true knowledge of God and to understand the things of the Spirit. He has an understanding by which he may know natural things. He can reason, investigate truth, and learn much of God’s wisdom as it is displayed in the works of creation. He is capable of knowing the moral truths of God’s Word as mere abstract propositions, but a true, spiritual, saving apprehension of them is utterly beyond his unaided powers. There is a positive defect and inability in his mind. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1Co 2:14).

By the “natural man” is unquestionably meant the unrenewed man, the man in whom the miracle of regeneration and illumination has not been effected. The context makes this clear, “Now we [Christians] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God” (1Co 2:12). And for what end had the Spirit been given unto them? Why, that they might be delivered from their chains of ignorance, that their inability of mind might be removed, so that “We might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1Co 2:12). “Which things [of the Spirit] also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1Co 2:13). Here is a contrast between man’s wisdom and its teachings and the Spirit’s wisdom and His teachings. That the “natural man” of verse 14 is unregenerate is further seen from contrasting him from the “spiritual” man in verse 15.

A divine explanation is here given as to why the natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God. It is a most cogent and solemn one—“For they are foolishness unto him” (1Co

2:14). That is, he rejects them because they are absurd to his apprehension. It is contrary to the very nature of the human mind to receive as truth that which it deems to be preposterous. And why do the things of the Spirit of God appear unto the natural man as foolishness? Are they not in themselves the consummation of wisdom? Wisdom is not folly—no, yet it may appear such and be so treated, even by minds which in other matters are of quick and accurate perception. The wisdom of the higher mathematician is foolishness to the illiterate. Why so? because he cannot understand it. He has not the power of mind to comprehend the mighty thoughts of a Newton.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them” (1Co 2:14). They are beyond his power to comprehend. Why so? Do not many of the unregenerate possess vigorous and clear-thinking minds? can they not reason accurately when they have perceived clearly? Have not some of the unconverted given the most illustrious displays of the powers of the human intellect? Why, then, cannot they know the things of the Spirit? This, too, is answered by 1 Corinthians 2:14, because those things require a peculiar power of discernment, which the unrenewed have not—“They are spiritually discerned” and the natural man is not spiritual. Until he is taught of God—until the eyes of his understanding be enlightened (Eph 1:18)—he will never see any beauty in the Christ of God or any wisdom in the Spirit of God.

If further proof be needed of the mental inability of the natural man, it is furnished in those passages which speak of the Spirit’s illumination. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). Hence, “The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” is said to be the gift of the Father (Eph 1:17). Previously to that gift, “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you” (1Jo 2:27). From these passages it is evident—(1) That the mind of man is in a state of spiritual darkness. (2) That it continues, and will continue so, until the Spirit of God gives it light or knowledge. (3) That this giving of light or knowledge is by divine power, a miracle of grace, as truly a miracle as when, at the beginning, the Lord said, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

Against what has been pointed out above, it has been objected, Man possesses the organ of vision and therefore he has the ability to see. Although he has not the light—remove the obstructing shutters and the prisoner in his dungeon sees. But let us not be deceived by such sophistry. It is not true that a man having a sound eye has the ability to see. It is often contrary to facts, both naturally and spiritually. Without light he cannot see, he has not the ability to do so. Yea, those with sound eyes and light, too, cannot see all things, even things which are perceptible to others—myopia or shortsightedness prevents. A man may be able to see with the mind’s eye a simple proposition who cannot see the force of a profound argument.

Third, the moral powers of man’s soul are paralyzed by the Fall. Darkness on the understanding, ignorance in the mind, corruption of the affections, must of necessity radically affect motives and choice. To insist that either the mind or the will has a power to act contrary to motive is a manifest absurdity, for in that case it would not be a moral act at all. The very essence of morality is a capacity to be influenced by considerations of right and wrong. Were a rational mind to act without any motive—a contradiction in terms—it certainly would not be a moral act. Motives are simply the mind’s view of things, influencing to action—and since the understanding has been blinded by sin and the affections so corrupted, then it is obvious that until he be renewed, man will reject the good and choose the evil.

As we have already pointed out, man is unwilling to choose the good because he is disinclined thereto, and he chooses evil because his heart is biased thereunto—men love darkness rather than light. Surely no proof of such assertions is needed. All history too sadly testifies to their verity. It is a waste of breath to ask for evidence that man is inclined unto evil as the sparks fly upward. Common observation and our own personal consciousness alike bear witness to this lamentable fact. Equally plain is it that it is the derangement of the mind by sin which affects the moral power of perceiving right and wrong, enfeebling or destroying the force of moral motives.

An unregenerate and a regenerate man may contemplate the same subject matter, view the same objects, but how differently their moral perceptions! Therefore, their motives and actions will be quite different—the things seen by their minds being different, diverse effects are necessarily produced upon them. The one sees a “root out of a dry ground” (Isa 53:2) in which there is “no form nor comeliness,” whereas the other sees One who is “altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). In consequence, He is despised and rejected by the former, whereas He is loved and embraced by the latter. While such are the views (perceptions) of the two individuals, respectively, such must be their choice and conduct. It is impossible to be otherwise. Their moral perceptions must be changed before it is possible for their volitions to be altered.

Such is the ruined condition of the fallen creature. No human power is able to effect any alteration in the moral perceptions of sinful men. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). Nothing short of the miracle-working, new-creating power of God’s all mighty Spirit can enable the mentally and morally blind sinner to see divine light clearly. Here, then, lies the moral inability of the natural man. It consists in the lack of adequate powers of moral perception. His moral sense is prostrated, his mind unable to properly discern between good and evil, truth and falsehood, God and mammon, Christ and Belial. Not that he can perceive no difference, but that he cannot appreciate in any tolerable degree the excellence of truth or the glory of its Author. He cannot discern the real baseness of falsehood or the degradation of vice.

It is a great mistake to suppose that fallen man possesses adequate faculties for such moral perception, and lacks only the necessary moral light. The very opposite is the actual case. Moral light shines all around him, but his powers of vision are gone. He walks in darkness while the midday splendours of the sun of righteousness shine all around him. Fables are regarded as truth, but the truth itself is rejected. Shadows are chased, but the Substance is ignored. The Gospel is “hid to them that are lost” (2Co 4:3). When the Lord of glory is presented to sinners they “see in him no beauty that they should desire him.” So blind is the natural man that he gropes in the noonday and stumbles over the Rock of ages. And unless a sovereign God is pleased to have mercy upon him, his moral blindness continues until he passes out into the “blackness of darkness for ever.”

The deprivation of our nature consists not in the absence of intelligence, but of ability to use our reason in a wise and fit manner. That which man lost at the Fall was not a faculty, but a principle. He still retains everything which is requisite to constitute him a rational, moral, and responsible being, but he threw away that uprightness which secured the approbation of God. He lost the principle of holiness, and with it, all power to keep the Moral Law. Nor is this all—a foreign element entered into man, corrupting his whole being—an element diametrically opposed to God. The principle of holiness was supplanted by the principle of sin, and this has rendered man utterly unable to act in a spiritual manner. True, he may mechanically, or by way of imitation, perform spiritual acts (such as pray), yet he cannot perform them in a spiritual

manner—from spiritual motives and for spiritual ends. He has no moral ability to do so. True, he can do many things, but none rightly—in a way pleasing unto God.

## A MUTUAL COMPLAINT

My brethren, are we all clear in this respect? Do not many of God's people need to bemoan their worldliness? Once Christ was all with you, brethren, is it so, now? Once you despised the world, and condemned alike its pleasures and its frowns, but now are not the chains of worldly custom upon you? Are not many of you enslaved by fashion and eaten up with frivolity? Do not some of you run as greedily as worldlings after the questionable enjoyments of this present life? Ought these things to be so? Can they remain so and your souls enjoy the Lord's smile? "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Mat 6:24). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1Jo 2:15). You cannot be Christ's disciple and be in fellowship with the ungodly. Come ye out from among them, be ye separate—touch not the unclean thing. Then shall ye know right joyfully that the Lord is a Father to you, and that ye are His sons and daughters. But brethren, have ye gone unto Jesus without the camp and do ye abide there with Him? Is the line of your separation visible—aye, is it existing? Is there any separation at all? Is it not often the case that the professed people of God are mixed up with the sons of men so that you cannot discern the one from the other? If it be so with any of us, let him humble himself and let him cry in bitterness, "Oh that I were as in months past" (Job 29:2).

Brothers and sisters, feel ye the breath of the winnowing fan again? How is it with you in private prayer? Are there not believers, and we hope true believers too, who are lax in devotion? The morning prayer is brief but alas! it is not fervent; the evening prayer is too often sleepy; ejaculations are few and far between; communion with heaven is distant, suspended, almost nonexistent in many cases. Look ye to this, my brethren, let each man commune with his own heart, and be still. Think not of others just now, but let each one consider his ways. How is it with your love to the souls of sinners? Does the tear tremble in your eye as it once did for lost souls, perishing without Christ? Alas, upon how many has a hardening influence operated. Ah, and this is true even of us ministers. We have grown professional in our service, and now we preach like automatons, wound up for a season, to run down when the discourse is over, and we have little more care for the souls of men than if they were so much dirt.

Fifth, these regrets by themselves are useless. It is unprofitable to read these words of Job and say, "Just so, that is how I feel," and then continue in the same way. If a man has neglected his business and so has lost his trade, it may mark a turn in his affairs when he says, "I wish I had been more industrious," but if he abides in the same sloth as before, of what use is his regret? If he shall fold his arms and say, "O that I had dug that plot of land, O that I had sown that field," no harvest will come because of his lamentations. Up, man, up and labour, or you will have the sluggard's reward—rags and poverty will be your portion. If a man be in declining health, if drunkenness and riot have broken down his constitution, it may mark a salutary reform in his history if he confesses his former folly. But if his regrets end in mere expressions, will these heal him? I think not. So neither will a man, affected by spiritual decline, be restored by the mere fact of his knowing himself to be so. Let him go to the beloved Physician, drink of the waters of life again, and receive the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations.

I have known some, I fear, who even satisfied themselves with expressions of regret. “Ah,” say they, “I am a deep-experienced man, I can go where Job went. I can mourn and lament as Job did.” Remember, many have been on Job’s dunghill, who knew nothing of Job’s God. Many have imitated David in his sins, who never followed him in his repentance. They have gone from their sin into hell by the way of presumption, whereas David went from it to heaven by the road of contrition and forgiveness. Never let us, merely because we feel some uneasiness within, conclude that this suffices. If in the dead of the night you should hear thieves in your house, you would not congratulate yourself because you were awake to hear them. You would waive all such comfortable reflections till the rogues were driven out and your property was safe. And so, when you know things are amiss with you, do not say, “I am satisfied, because I know it is so.” Up, man, and with all the strength that God’s Holy Spirit gives you, strive to drive out these traitors from your bosom, for they are robbing your soul of his best treasures.

Sixth, these regrets when they are necessary are very humbling. Meditate now for a minute. Think, dear brother, what was thy position in thy happiest times, in those days that are now past. Had you any love to spare then? You were zealous—were you too zealous? You were gracious—were you too gracious? Nay, in our best estate, we were very far short of what we ought to be, and yet we have gone back from even that. It was a poor attainment at the best, have we fallen even from that? During the time we have been going back, we ought to have gone forward. What enjoyments we have lost by our wanderings—what progress we have missed! As John Bunyan (1628-1688) well puts it, when Christian fell asleep and lost his roll, he had to go back for it, and he found it very hard going back, and moreover, he had to go on again, so that he had to traverse three times the road he need only have traversed once. And then he came in late at the gates of the palace Beautiful, and was afraid of the lions, of which he would have had no fear had not the darkness set in. We know not what we lose, when we lose growth in grace.

Alas, how much the church has lost through us, for if the Christian becomes poor in grace, he lessens the church’s wealth of grace. We have a common exchequer as a church, and everyone who takes away his proportion from it, robs the whole. Dear brethren, how accountable are many of us for the low tone of religion in the world, especially those of us who occupy the foremost ranks. If grace be at a low ebb with us, others say, “Well, look at so and so, I am as good as he.” So much in the church do we take the cue from one another, that each one of us is in a measure responsible for the low state of the whole. Some of us are very quick to see the faults of others—may it not be that those faults are our own children? Those who have little love to others generally discover that there is little love in the church, and I notice that those who complain of the inconsistencies of others, are usually the most inconsistent persons themselves. Shall I be a robber of my fellow Christian? Shall I be an injury to the cause of Christ? Shall I be a comfort unto sinners in their sin? Shall I rob Christ of His glory? I, who was saved from such depths of sin. I, who have been favoured with such enjoyments of His presence. I, that have been on Tabor’s top with Him and seen Him transfigured. I, that have been in His banqueting house and have drunk out of the flagons of His love—shall I be so devoid of grace, that I shall even injure His children and make His enemies to blaspheme? Wretch that I am, to do this.

Seventh, yet these regrets may be made very profitable in many other ways. First, they show us what human nature is. Have we gone back so far? O, brethren, we might have gone back to perdition. We should have done so, if it had not been for the grace of God. What a marvel it is that God has borne with our ill manners, when He might justly have laid the reins on our necks, and suffered us to rush on in the road which we so often hankered after. So you see, dear brethren,

what a body of death we carry with us, and what a terrible power it possesses. When you see the mischief that corruption has already done, never trust yourself, but seek for new grace every day.

Again—learn to prize what spiritual blessings yet remain. If you have such better regrets for what you have lost, hold fast what is still yours. Slip back no further, for if those slips have cost you so much, take heed that they do not ruin you. To continue presumptuous may be a proof that our profession is rotten throughout. Only a holy jealousy can remove the suspicion of insincerity. Let your previous failings teach you to walk cautiously for the future. Be jealous, for you serve a jealous God. Since gray hairs may come upon you, here and there, and you may not know it, search, try yourself day by day, lest you relapse yet more.

This should teach us to live by faith, since our best attainments fail us. We rejoice today, but we may mourn tomorrow. What a mercy it is that our salvation does not depend on what we are or what we feel. Christ has finished our salvation—no man can destroy what He hath completed. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and is safe there—none can pluck us out of JEHOVAH'S hands. Since we so frequently run aground, it is clear that we should be wrecked altogether if we went to sea in a legal vessel with self for our pilot. Let us keep to the good ship of free grace, steered by immutable faithfulness, for none other bring us to the desired haven. But oh, let that free grace fill us with ardent gratitude. Since Christ has kept us, though we could not keep ourselves, let us bless His name. And overwhelmed with obligations, let us rise with a solemn determination that we will serve Him better than we have ever done before, and may His blessed Spirit help us to make the determination a fact.

Eighth, these regrets ought not to be continual. They ought to be removed, decidedly removed, by an earnest effort, made in God'S strength to get back to the position which we occupied before, and to attain something better still. Dear brothers and sisters, if any of you desire now to come into the higher life and to feel anew your first love, what shall I say to you? Go back to where you started. Do not stay discussing whether you are a Christian or not. Go to Christ as a poor guilty sinner. When the door to heaven seems shut to me as a saint, I will get through it as a sinner, trusting in the precious blood of Jesus. Come and stand again, as though all your sins were on you still, at the foot of the cross, where still may be seen the dripping blood of the infinitely precious atonement. Saviour, I trust Thee again. Guilty, more guilty than I was before, a sinful child of God, I trust Thee, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquities, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psa 51:2). You will never have your graces revived, unless you go to the cross. Begin life again. The best air for a man to breathe when he is sickly is said to be that of his birthplace. It was at Calvary we were born, it is only at Calvary we can be restored when we are declining. Do the first works—as a sinner, repair to the Saviour and ask to be restored.

Then, as a further means of health, search out the cause of your declension. Probably it was a neglect of private prayer. Where the disease began, there must the remedy be applied. Pray more earnestly, more frequently, more importunately. Or was it a neglect of hearing the Word? Were you enticed by novelty or cleverness away from a really searching and instructive ministry? Go back and feed on wholesome food again—perhaps that may cure the disease. Or have you been too grasping after the world? Brother, you loved God when you had but one shop, you have two now, and are giving all your time and thoughts to business, and your soul is getting lean. Man alive, strike off some of that business, for it is a bad business that makes your soul poor. I would not check industry or enterprise for a single moment. Let a man do all he can, but not at the expense of his soul. Push on, but do not push down your soul. You may buy gold too dear, and may attain a high position in this world at a cost which you may have to rue all your days. Where the mischief began there apply the remedy. And I urge upon you, and most of all upon myself, do

not make excuses for yourselves. Do not palliate your faults. Do not say it must be so. Do not compare yourselves among yourselves or you will be unwise, but to the perfect image of Christ let your hearts aspire, to the ardour of your divine Redeemer, who loved not Himself, but loved you.

There are some here who will say, “I do not comprehend this sermon. I have no cause to look back with regret. I have always been much the same as I am. I know nothing of religion.” The day shall come when you will envy the least and most trembling believer. To you careless, Christless sinners, the day shall come when you will cry to the rocks for mercy and beg them to conceal you from the eyes of Him whom now you dare despise. I beseech you be not high minded, lift up your horn on high, speak not so exceeding proud—bow before the Christ of God and ask Him to give you the new life. For even if that new life has declined and become sickly, it is better than the death in which you dwell. Go and seek grace of Him who alone can give it, and He will grant it you for His infinite mercy’s sake. Amen.—Charles H. Spurgeon, 1871.

## STRANGE FIRE

At a still later date it is recorded of Uzziah the king that, “When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD....And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house” (2Ch 26:16 19, 21). What a solemn lesson was that! How plainly it manifested the sore displeasure of the Lord against those who chafe against the restrictions which He imposes, and who determine to take upon themselves a work to which He has not called them. Yes, king though he was, yet his royal dignity could not afford shelter from divine judgment, for God is no respecter of persons, and monarch and menial alike must obey His commands or suffer the consequences of insubordination.

Now my reader, have these unspeakably solemn incidents no message for us today? It is true that in this Christian dispensation there is no divinely appointed class to come between the Lord and His people. It is true that all believers are “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5). But this does not mean that there are no divinely called and divinely qualified officers of Christ to administer the affairs of His kingdom, and that every Christian may regard himself as entitled to preach His Gospel and administer His ordinances. No indeed—very far from it. Nothing but the utmost confusion can ensue where every Tom, Dick, and Harry pushes himself forward to perform work for which he is not qualified. The principle of, “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God” (Heb 5:4) holds good as truly today as it did in Old Testament times.

“My brethren, be not many masters [R.V. “teachers”], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jam 3:1). The word which is here rendered “masters” signifies “teachers”

being the plural of the one used in John 3:10, “art thou a master in Israel?” “Many converts to Christianity would be desirous of the distinction of teachers: with a view to the credit and pre-eminence of that office, or from a mistaken idea that they could not glorify God or do good to men in other states. While perhaps they were not aware of the weight and difficulties of the work, and the solemn account which must be given of it. But they ought to know and seriously consider that teachers must stand a greater or more strict judgment than other men...Did men but truly weigh the importance and difficulty of the sacred ministry, the account which must be given of it, the trials and temptations to which it exposes them, they would be less forward than they sometimes are in aspiring to that distinction” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2Ti 4:3). During recent years much has been written upon the first part of this verse, but in all our reading (now more than two million pages of religious and theological literature), we do not recall having seen a single comment upon the words we have placed in italics. It is a most significant and ominous fact that the fulfillment of these two predictions have synchronized, for the rejection of “sound doctrine” and the multiplying of men who term themselves “Bible teachers” have kept pace steadily with each other. The solemn thing is that the “teachers” referred to in 2 Timothy 4:3 are not divinely called, but self-appointed ones, and they may easily be identified by their opposition to the truth. Not one of the “Bible teachers” we have read believes in unconditional election, particular redemption, or the Christian sabbath!

Not only has there been a noticeable multiplication of religious “teachers” during the last fifty years, but the rank and file of professing Christians have, in many instances, been pressed into the doing of “personal work.” In some circles of considerable prominence, young Christians (of both sexes) are taught it is their bounden duty to become “soul winners,” and that only by regularly “leading sinners to Christ” can their own spiritual lives be kept in a healthy estate. Every once in a while we receive letters from those who have been brought into deep distress by such erroneous teachings. They did not feel qualified for the task, but unwilling to be thought “strange” by their friends, they ignored the instincts of modesty and propriety, and spoke to their acquaintances about Christ, only to be repulsed and made miserable through lack of “success.” Then they fear there must be something seriously wrong with themselves, seeing that God withholds His blessing from their efforts.

Of course such “teachers” and leaders make a pretence of appealing to the Scriptures in support of their vagaries. “Pretence” we say, for they cannot find a single sentence in either the Old or the New Testaments where the Lord bade the rank and file of His people to engage in any such activities. What, then, do they do? Why, they “wrest” the Word of God and wrongly “divide” the same. In the past we have called attention to several misapplied and wrongly appropriated promises of the New Testament. We now direct notice to some precepts which are put to an entirely false use. These promises, as we showed, pertained only unto the apostles and their immediate successors—so, too, the precepts we are to look at are given to God’s official servants and not unto the saints at large.

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mar 16:15). He said unto whom? The verse immediately preceding tells us—unto “the eleven.” What right has any man to apply the apostolic commission promiscuously? None whatever—to do so is to play fast and loose with the Holy Word of God. In the parallel passage, those whom Christ here ordered to preach the Gospel, He authorized to “baptize” and to “teach” (see Mat 28:19-20), which makes it quite clear to any God-fearing soul that such offices can only be

discharged by the duly authorized ministers of God. To “preach the Gospel” is no child’s play. It requires an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, long training in the school of Christ, an experimental acquaintance with its contents, and a special endowment from on high. “Novices” are debarred from this holy vocation (1Ti 3:6), for instead of attempting to expound the divine mysteries, they themselves need to be thoroughly indoctrinated.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Co 5:20). Probably quite a number of our readers will be surprised to hear that such a verse as this is given a general meaning and application to all God’s people and that babes in Christ (and empty professors) are told they are Christ’s “ambassadors,” but we ought not to be surprised at anything in this decadent and demented age. One had thought the very term “ambassadors” would be quite enough to prevent such an excuseless mistake. An ambassador is the official representative of a potentate duly authorized to act on his sovereign’s behalf. King George has his ambassador in Washington, but suppose that every British subject now residing in the U.S.A. should busy themselves in diplomatic affairs and pretend they were ambassadors of the Court of St James—not only would they serve no useful purpose, but they would mislead people and create endless confusion. And this is exactly what these “personal workers” do—uncalled of God, unqualified by the Spirit, possessing the merest smattering of the truth, they distort the Gospel and delude those whose ears they gain.

It is at this very point that untold damage has been done. Wrongly taught themselves, holding an entirely false conception of God’s purpose and His design in the Gospel, these “personal workers” have gone forth only to deceive and seduce the unwary. Telling all who will listen to them that God loves everybody, that Christ died for the redemption of the whole human race, they assure their hearers they can be saved immediately by “simply accepting Christ as your personal Saviour.” They know not that God “hatest all workers of iniquity” (Psa 5:5), and that Christ died to “save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). They say little or nothing about the requirements of God, the righteous demands of His law, the fact that His wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom 1:18), and that the wicked must sincerely repent of and forsake their sins before they can obtain mercy.

This “personal work” campaign is a cheapening of the Gospel, a lowering of God’s standard, a perverting of His truth, and has produced a generation of unregenerate professors, who now infest the churches and assemblies. The “making of converts” is their goal, and quantity rather than quality is the great desire. We were personally acquainted with one of these personal workers, who had three years’ training in a large “Bible Institute.” He had vowed to “win a soul to Christ” every day that year. We met him after a rainy spell, and he told us the weather had sadly interfered with his schedule, for while it was so wet there was no one in the public parks whom he could accost. He was then “five souls behind,” and he told us, “I shall have to make up for lost time and win six souls to Christ today.” The tragic thing is that so few now can see anything wrong with this blasphemous burlesque.

It is needless to examine all the passages appealed to by these “teachers” in support of their errors, but we will look at one or two more. “He that winneth souls is wise” (Pro 11:30). Yes, because he has been specially called, qualified, and owned of God. But let Scripture interpret Scripture, “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3), and as to what is signified by the “stars,” Revelation 1:20 informs us. As to what is meant by the “watchman” in Ezekiel 33:2-6, the very next verse tells us, “O son of man [the prophet Ezekiel], I have set thee a watchman unto

the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me” (Eze 33:7).

When a sinner has been saved the Saviour’s word to him is, “Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee” (Luk 8:39). We are to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9). But is a young Christian never to open his mouth in testimony for Christ? We have not said so, but he must be very careful or otherwise he will be guilty of disobeying that divine injunction, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Mat 7:6). We shall not go far wrong if we are regulated by that exhortation, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1Pe 3:15). Let us beware of “strange fire”—zeal which is not according to knowledge. Let us be on our guard lest the Lord has occasion to ask us, “Who hath required this at your hand?” (see Isa 1:2). Read diligently through the whole of the epistles and see where the members of any church were exhorted to do “personal work” or seek to “win souls to Christ,” and you will find there is not one. Then be governed by God’s Word, even though all your religious associates deem you “cold,” “self-centered,” or “ensorious.”



# July

## WORLDLY SORROW

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2Co 7:10). We have already considered the nature of “godly sorrow” (see the “Godly Sorrow” articles in the May and June issues) and by what it is evidenced, namely, by a saving “repentance” or a forsaking of sin and turning unto God. It now remains for us to inquire wherein it differs from the “sorrow of the world.” This brings us to a vitally-important distinction, for all sorrow over sin is not a “godly” one, neither does it lead to evangelical repentance—evangelical repentance we say, for there is sometimes a repentance or remorse—as was displayed in the tragic case of Judas—which does not terminate in “salvation.” Such is “the sorrow of the world,” that is, the sorrow of the unregenerate, of those who are strangers unto the Lord. So far from their sorrow leading to life, it ends in death.

The sorrow of the world is the grief and mortification of disappointed worldlings, of those who know not God, but whose trust is in themselves or in some arm of flesh. They have relied for prosperity from the world and the world has sadly failed them. They have sought satisfaction from its broken cisterns, only to have their hopes dashed. The bitter springs from which their ambitions have proceeded are pride and carnal self-respect, and their motives and occasions for indulging the same are as manifold as the deceitful lusts of the flesh. But frustrated plans and defeated expectations sour and enrage, and nature’s greenness is turned into the drought of unrepentant grief. So far from leading the soul to God, it fills with wrath and enmity against Him. Its miserable subjects seek consolation from the world, endeavouring to drive away serious reflections by drowning themselves in its pleasures.

The sorrow of the world does not arise from just views of sin, nor does it proceed from any concern that God has been offended. It does not lead the soul to God in true penitence, nor turn to Him for consolation. The sorrow of the unregenerate is occasioned by temporal losses, which fill them with chagrin and dismay; by crimes which incur public disgrace for their perpetrators and their families; from the squandering of a goodly heritage which terminates in poverty and despair; from wandering from the path of chastity, and in consequence losing their good name among men; from intemperance and reckless living, which ends in ruined health and vain regrets for having played the fool. In all such cases there is no contrition of heart for having violated a righteous law, offended a kind Creator, or been an occasion of stumbling to their fellows. It is only that they are incensed at the harvest which follows their evil sowing and fretful because lack of money or health prevents them from continuing such excesses.

There are some worldly men who experience religious convictions and they are grieved because they cannot obtain heaven in their own way. This is seen in the case of the rich young

ruler who came to Christ, but who, when he learned that denying of self was required of him, “went away sorrowful” (Mat 19:22). There are those who have a sense of eternity and yet are wedded to their lusts. They desire happiness hereafter, but they will not forsake their idols now and so they are troubled. They cannot have Christ and the world—Christ for their consciences—and the world for their affections. They are unwilling to break away from the love of this world so that they might be saved in the world to come, and therefore are they grieved that they cannot have both. A pertinent case in point is that of Balaam.

Such “sorrow” as we have referred to in the above paragraph is but a superficial and transient emotion which has no lasting and spiritual effects. Alas, of its possessors it has to be said, “Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hos 6:4). Their weeping eyes soon dry up, as we see in the cases of Esau and Ahab. Again—such sorrow is occasioned not by mourning over sin as sin, but over the retribution it brings. A solemn example of this appears in the life of Pharaoh when the divine judgments were upon his kingdom, “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, Intreat the LORD, that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people” (Exo 8:8). Note well it was not, “Intreat the LORD to remove my pride, my obstinacy, my hatred of his people, but only let the plague be stayed.” Contrast the prayer of David under similar circumstances, “Take away the iniquity of thy servant” (2Sa 24:10)—not take away the pestilence from my land!

“The sorrow of the world worketh death” (2Co 7:10) because that is the appointed and inevitable fruit of the impenitent workings of an unregenerate will. It is a great mistake to suppose that the natural tendency of trial and trouble, loss and pain, is unto good. Not so—their trend is rather to excite rebellion against God. It is only when our sufferings are divinely sanctified to us that they are made to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Just as surely as happiness is the attendant of holiness, so misery is the certain entail of sin. When the worldling’s dream of natural happiness has been dispelled by crime, by misfortune, or by the long-resisted Spirit of God, he feeds only on the sour bread of self-reproach and unblessed woe. He often willfully accelerates the desire for relief which he vainly hopes to find in death—which so far from ending his sorrow only conducts him into the blackness of darkness forever.

“The sorrow of the world worketh death” (2Co 7:10)—temporal and eternal. “Death” is to be taken here in its widest latitude, including all the disastrous consequences of sin. The results of godly sorrow are salutary, the effects of worldly sorrow are abortive and evil. They produce only ill-health and distress, and are attended with no consolation or compensation. The sorrow of the world debilitates the body, disturbs peace, impairs the mind, and breaks the spirit. There is no contrite seeking unto God on the part of the suffering one, but only a fretting and murmuring against Him. The more miserable a man becomes the harder his heart, “They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev 16:10-11). Worldly sorrow is the certain prelude to desperation unless God prevents, as witness the horrible cases of Saul and Ahithophel.

How important it is, then, that we should seek grace to turn all our mourning unto a spiritual channel, that we may sorrow “after a godly manner”—with grief for having dishonoured God with a dependence on His mercy, with a purpose to henceforth obey Him. Sorrow over sin and exercise about our eternal interests will avail us nothing unless it works repentance, and even repentance may be counterfeited and so not be “unto salvation.” Unless sin be mourned over as the cause of all our suffering, and God be viewed as the righteous yet merciful Author of the same, grief under afflictions produces only increasing enmity unto despair. If after prayerfully pondering these articles any of our readers are brought to grieve over the hardness of their hearts

and are concerned because of their lack of godly sorrow, that is sure proof they are not devoid of this spiritual grace.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *14. Prayer—Matthew 6:5-8*

As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs last month, we are now in the fourth division of our Lord's sermon, a division which includes the first eighteen verses of Matthew 6, the general subject of which is the performing of good works so as to secure the approbation of God. In order to this, His disciples must shun not only the false doctrines, but also the evil practices of the scribes and Pharisees. The keynote is struck in the opening verse, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them" (R.V.). The general principle which is expressed in this warning is enlarged upon in verses 2-18, being applied to three specific cases—in "alms" manward, in "prayer" Godward, and in "fasting" selfward. Having already dwelt upon the first, we now turn unto what Christ here had to say upon the second. By keeping in mind the connection, we shall the better perceive His scope and design, and be preserved from an erroneous interpretation of the clauses which are to be before us.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites (Mat 6:5). The opening words make it quite clear that Christ takes it for granted His disciples will pray, and in what follows He reveals the need there is for them to be diligent to perform this duty in a way acceptable to God. When the Lord assured Ananias of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus He said, "Behold, he prayeth" (Act 9:11). As a "Pharisee of the Pharisees" he had made many long prayers, but not until the miracle of grace had been wrought within him could it be said that he prayed. Saying prayers and pouring out the heart before God are totally different things—a self-righteous Pharisee may be diligent in the former, only one who has been born again will do the latter. As another has said, "The moment a spiritual babe is born into the new creation it sends up a cry of helpless dependence toward the source of its birth."

That which is now to engage our attention consists of the first recorded utterance of Christ on the subject of prayer, and it is most searching and solemn to note that it opens with a warning against hypocrisy in the discharge of this duty. That particular species of hypocrisy which is here reprehended is ostentatiousness in our devotions, the public parading of our piety, the seeking to attract the notice of others, and win for ourselves the reputation of great spirituality. Prayer is the expression of creature-need and dependence, and therefore it is utterly inconsistent with thoughts of pride and self-complacency. But alas, such is fallen man that he can unite these opposites, and therefore our need of this caution, "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites." A "hypocrite" is one who assumes a character which does not belong to him. The "hypocrites" which Christ had immediately in view were the Pharisees (Mat 23:13), for their "leaven" was hypocrisy (Luk 12:1).

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Mat 6:5). We need hardly say that Christ is not here condemning this posture of standing in prayer (for He Himself employed it, John 11:41), nor is He forbidding His disciples to pray in public. Paul gave thanks unto God in the presence of a

whole ship's company (Act 27:35), and in his epistles gave order that "Men pray every where" (1Ti 2:8). No, rather was it the motive and manner of prayer which our Lord here had in view. It is a caution against vainglory, the seeking to commend ourselves unto our fellows. And what sort of creatures are we that need this caution. Think of it—praying to God, in order that we may be seen of men! In how many ways does the evil of our hearts lead us away from godly simplicity and sincerity.

Sin defiles our very devotions and unless we are very much on our guard, it will not only render them invalid, but an offense unto God. Particularly does the minister need to place a strict watch upon himself in his public praying, lest he be guilty of praying to the congregation rather than unto God. Alas, does not a spirit of hypocrisy often creep into the pulpit prayers of those who could not justly be called "hypocrites"? It is but natural that the minister should desire to be regarded as a highly spiritual man, as one who enjoys very close communion with God, whose aspirations of soul are of a most exalted order. It is no easy matter not to be mindful that there are many critical ears which are listening to our petitions, and to be affected accordingly both in the matter and manner of our supplications. Would not our public prayers often be simpler and shorter if we were alone with God?

What need there is, then, that those who are accustomed to lead in public prayer should diligently examine their hearts and cry earnestly unto God for the mortifying of their pride. What is the good opinion of fellow-sinners worth if we have not the Lord's "Well done"? Let us be more careful in seeing to it that our affections prompt each petition, than in giving thought to the expressing of them in words which will charm the ears of men. Truth and sincerity in the heart are vastly more important than choice language or a correct demeanour. Let us seek grace to heed that exhortation, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God....Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecc 5:1-2). If the divine perfections duly impress our souls then we shall be saved from much folly.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father" (Mat 6:6). Having condemned the vice of hypocrisy in the former verse, our Lord now commended the virtue of sincerity and instructs us in the right manner of praying to God. It seems strange that some have quite missed Christ's meaning here, a few extremists supposing that He forbade all praying in the congregation. That which our Lord was reprehending in the previous verse was not public prayer, but personal praying in public which was done with the object of calling attention to ourselves. The Lord Jesus encouraged social praying in His memorable declaration, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst" (Mat 18:20), which was specifically a promise to praying souls, having no reference at all to the Lord's Supper. That united prayer was practiced by the early Christians is clear from many passages in the Acts, see 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; 12:5; 16:13.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Mat 6:6). In our exposition of Matthew 5, we have shown repeatedly that much of our Lord's language in this sermon cannot be understood literally, and if this principle be borne in mind we shall be preserved from unwarrantably restricting His scope and meaning in this verse. Viewed in the light of its immediate context, we regard this verse as, first, giving most necessary directions to the one who leads in public prayer. So far from engaging therein in order to win human esteem, we must discharge the duty in precisely the same spirit of humility and sincerity as though we were alone, engaged in private prayer. Entering the closet and closing the door was a figurative way of saying,

shut out from thy mind all thoughts of the creature and have respect unto God alone. Be not occupied with those present, but with Him who is invisible.

While we are satisfied that the first reference in verse 6 is to public prayer, yet (as the greater includes the less) there is also important teaching here concerning private prayer. Three things in it are to be noted—the place of prayer, the privacy, and privilege thereof. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.” By the “closet” we are to understand a place of seclusion and retirement. Our omniscient Saviour knew the tendency of our minds to stray, how easily our thoughts wander away from God, and therefore He exhorts us to get away from everything which disturbs and distracts, to some quiet spot where our communion with God may not be hindered. Private prayer is to be as secret as possible and this calls for a secluded spot, a place free from the observations and interruptions of our fellows. When Christ engaged in private prayer, He withdrew from the crowd and retired to the solitude of the mountain.

Ere passing on it should be pointed out that we must be careful not to run to an unwarrantable extreme at this point, otherwise we should make this verse clash with other passages. If on the one hand, we must be careful to avoid ostentation and seeking the praise of men, yet on the other, we must be on our guard against intimidation and being unfaithful through the fear of men. Daniel closed not the windows of his room when praying, even though he knew that he was thereby endangering his life (Dan 6:10). Even when in a public place, we should not allow the sneers of others to hinder us from bowing our heads and returning thanks to God at meal times, nor to kneel by our bedside at night if someone else be sharing the room.

“Enter into thy closet” (Mat 6:6)—these words suggest not only a silent and secluded place, but also a stated place—whether it be in the fields, the woods, or our own dwelling. When David received tidings of the death of Absalom, we are told that he “went up to the chamber over the gate” and wept (2Sa 18:33), as though that was the spot where he was accustomed to pour out his griefs unto the Lord. When the widow of Zarephath acquainted Elijah with the death of her son, the prophet “carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed,” and then and there “he cried unto the LORD” (1Ki 17:19-20). The same practice was evidently followed by our Saviour, for we read that He “went [for the specific purpose of making supplication to God], as he was wont, [accustomed] to the Mount of Olives” (Luk 22:39).

It is interesting to note that the Greek word for “closet” occurs but four times in the original of the New Testament—in Matthew 24:26, it is translated “secret chambers.” Our Lord’s language was most probably adopted from Isaiah 26:20, “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee.” Now what would these words “enter into thy closet” (Mat 6:6) suggest to a Jew? The “closet” is simply a closed place, shut in for privacy, shut out from obtrusion. What would such a term naturally suggest to Christ’s hearers? There was one place in their midst which was pre eminently a secret chamber, namely, the innermost section of the temple, where JEHOVAH had His special dwelling in the holy of holies. It was peculiarly a “closet,” from which the people were excluded. It was a place marked by silence and secrecy, seclusion, and separation.

The holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple was of unique design. It had neither door nor window, and unlike the inner courts of Orientals which are opened to the sky, this one was roofed in and had no skylight. None of the Levites were permitted to enter, save only the high priest, who went there as the representative of the nation to meet with God. Significantly enough, there was in it but a single piece of furniture, namely, the sacred ark covered by the mercy-seat. How unspeakably blessed, Aaron drew nigh to converse with God at a blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. There was one notable exception to what we have just pointed out, “And when Moses was gone

into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him” (Num 7:89). Thus the holy “closet” was where man spake to God and God to him.

There are two expressions in our verse which emphasize the note of privacy in our individual devotions, “When thou hast shut thy door” and “Pray to thy Father who is in secret.” The former suggests the need for seclusion and silence—the getting away from all sights and sounds which would disturb and distract. The latter means, get alone with God, enter the secret place of the Most High, converse and commune with Him in the holy of holies. Let the reader carefully note the special stress which is here laid upon the singular number of the second personal pronoun, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thou closet,” etc. Here is something which is unique in all the Word of God—no less than eight times in this one verse is the second person used in the singular number. Nothing could bring out more strikingly the imperative need of being alone with God—for this the world must be entirely shut out.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Mat 6:6). How clear it is that both the spirit and the letter of this verse rebukes those misguided souls who clamour for churches and chapels to be kept perpetually open so that any member of the public may repair there for private devotions either day or night, as if buildings set apart for religious exercises were any nearer to the throne of grace than our own dwellings or the open fields. The Lord of heaven and earth “dwelleth not in temples made with hands...he be not far from every one of us” (Act 17:24, 27). The localization of worship was abolished when Christ declared, “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:21, 24). The argument that church buildings should be kept open for the benefit of those away from home can have no weight in the face of Matthew 6:5-6. Such an innovation is certain to be abused.

“Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:6). Here is set forth the holy and unspeakable privilege of prayer. Here we are invited to freely open our minds and hearts unto Him who cares for us, acquainting Him with our needs and cares, making known our requests with thanksgiving. “Pray to thy Father which is in secret.” He is invisible to carnal sight, imperceptible to our bodily senses, but a living reality unto faith. We must therefore labour to come into His conscious presence, seek to acquaint ourselves with Him, and make Him real to our souls, for He is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” In order to this, after entering our closet and before offering up any petition, we need to meditate upon God’s wondrous perfections, to ponder His blessed attributes. Dwell upon His ineffable holiness, His almighty power, His unchanging faithfulness, His infinite mercy, above all rejoice in the fact that He is our Father.

“Pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:6). This is set over against, “They have their reward” of verse 5. Their “reward” is not the approbation of God, but merely the worthless admiration of their silly dupes who are imposed upon by an outward show of piety. They “have their reward,” for there is nothing but the gall of bitterness awaiting them in the future, “Men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Psa 17:14). Different far is it with the Christian. His prayers do not and cannot merit anything from God, yet if they are offered from right principles and unto right ends they are pleasing unto Him, and are rewarded even now by tokens of His favour, and in the day to come they shall be openly approved by Him.

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Mat 6:7). That which our Lord here condemned is not our asking again and again for the same thing, but the reducing of the duty and privilege of prayer to a mere lip labour. In Psalm 119, we find David praying, “Teach me thy statutes” no less than seven times. Our Saviour in the garden repeatedly asked for the removal of the cup and Paul thrice besought the Lord for the departure of his thorn in the flesh (2Co 12:8). It is vain repetitions which is prohibited, such as those used by the prophets of Baal (1Ki 18:26), the worshippers of Diana (Act 19:34), and the papists’ “Pater nosters” and “Ave marias,” which they are taught to use without meaning or devotion, and which they number by counting strings of beads [the rosary]. Cold and formal extempore prayers are equally forbidden, for they are mere babblings.

“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Mat 6:8). Here Christ presents as an inducement to praying souls the very reason which infidels use as an argument against prayer. If God be omniscient, what need is there for us to inform Him of our requirements? We do not present our requests to God in order to acquaint Him with our wants, but to render obedience unto His commandment which requires this duty from us. We pray unto God for the purpose of honouring Him, acknowledging Him to be the Knower of our hearts and the Giver of all mercies. Moreover, prayer is a means for us to rightly receive and improve the gifts of heaven, being an indispensable preparation of our soul thereto. It should be understood that this knowledge of our Father’s is far more than a bare cognition of our wants—it is such a solicitation for our welfare that ensures the supply of every needed thing.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### *7. At Zarephath*

“He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). This is a rule which it is both our wisdom and welfare to heed in all the varied details of our lives—never more needed by God’s people than in this mad age of speed and hurry. Most profitably may we apply it to our reading and study of God’s Word. It is not so much the amount of time we spend upon the Scriptures as it is the measure in which we prayerfully meditate upon that which is immediately before us. That largely determines the degree of benefit the soul receives therefrom. By passing too quickly from one verse to another, by failing to vividly picture before our minds the details before us, and by not taking pains to discover the practical lessons which may be drawn from historical events, we are greatly the losers. It is by putting ourselves in the position of the one we are reading about and thinking what we would most likely have done in such circumstances, that we receive the most help.

An illustration of what we have in view in the above paragraph is supplied by the stage we have now reached in the life of Elijah. Last month we arrived at the point where, “It came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up.” Let us not be in too big a hurry to turn unto what follows, rather should we endeavour to visualize the prophet’s situation and ponder the trial which confronted him. Picture the Tishbite there in his lowly retreat. Day by day the water in the brook steadily diminished, did his hopes do likewise? Did his songs of worship become feebler and less frequent as the streamlet rolled less noisily over its rocky bed? Was his harp hung upon the willows as he gave himself up to anxious thought and restlessly paced to and fro? There is

nothing in Scripture to intimate any such thing. God keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed upon Himself. Yes—but in order thereto, the heart must steadfastly confide in Him.

Ah, that is the very point—do we trust the Lord in trying circumstances or are we merely “fair weather Christians.” It is much to be feared that had we been there by the drying brook, our minds had been distracted, and instead of waiting patiently for the Lord, had fretted and schemed, wondering what we had better do next. And then one morning Elijah awoke to find the brook altogether dried up and his supply of sustenance completely cut off! What then should he do? Must he remain there and perish? for he could not expect to live long without something to drink. Must he not now take matters into his own hands and do the best he could for himself? Would it not be better to retrace his steps and risk the vengeance of Ahab than remain where he was and die of thirst? Can we doubt that Satan plied him with such temptations in his hour of testing?

The Lord had ordered him, “Hide thyself by the brook Cherith” (1Ki 17:3), adding, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1Ki 17:4). And it is striking and blessed to see that he remained there even after his supply of water had ceased. The prophet did not move his quarters until he received definite instruction from the Lord to do so. It was thus with Israel of old in the wilderness, as they journeyed to the promised land, “At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night....two days or a month, or a year...the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not” (Num 9:18-22). And that is expressly recorded for our instruction and comfort, and it is both our wisdom and welfare to heed the same.

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath” (1Ki 17:8-9). Did not this show plainly how worthless and needless was any carnal scheming on the part of the prophet, had he indulged in such. God had not “forgotten to be gracious” (Psa 77:9) nor would He leave His servant without the needed direction or guidance when His time had arrived to grant the same. How loudly ought this to speak unto our hearts! we who are far too full of our own plans and devisings. Instead of heeding that injunction, “My soul, wait thou only upon God” (Psa 62:5), we contrive some way of getting out of our difficulties and then ask the Lord to prosper the same. If a Samuel does not arrive just when we expect, then we try to force things (see 1Sa 13:12).

But let it be duly noted that before God’s word came afresh to Elijah, both his faith and his patience had been put to the proof. In going to Cherith, the prophet had acted under divine orders and therefore was he under God’s special care. Could he, then, come to any real harm under such guardianship? He must therefore remain where he is until God directs him to leave the place, no matter how unpleasant conditions may become. So with us. When it is clear that God has placed us where we are, there we must “abide” (see 1Co 7:20), even though our continuance in it be attended with hardships and apparent hazard. If, on the other hand, Elijah had left Cherith of his own accord, how could he count upon the Lord being with him and either provide for his wants or deliver him from his enemies? The same applies to us with equal force today.

We are now to consider the further provision which the Lord graciously made for His servant in his retirement. “And the word of the LORD came unto him” (1Ki 17:8). How often has His

word come to us—sometimes directly, sometimes through one of His servants, and we have wickedly refused to obey it. If not in actual words, our ways have been like that of the rebellious Jews, who in response to the affectionate remonstrance of Jeremiah replied, “As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee” (Jer 44:16). On other occasions, we have been like those spoken of in, “They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Eze 33:31-32). And why? Because the Word of God crosses our perverse wills and requires what is contrary to our natural inclinations.

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there” (1Ki 17:8-9). This meant that Elijah must be disciplined by still further trials and humblings. First of all, the name of the place to which God ordered His servant to go is deeply suggestive, for “Zarephath” means “refining,” coming from a root that signifies a crucible—the place where metals are melted. There lay before Elijah not only a further testing of his faith, but also the refining of it, for a “crucible” is for the purpose of separating dross from the fine gold. The experience which now confronted our prophet was a very trying and distasteful one to flesh and blood, for to go from Cherith to Zarephath involved a journey of a hundred miles across the desert. Ah, the place of refining is not easily reached and involves that from which all of us naturally shrink.

It is also to be carefully noted that Zarephath was “in Zidon,” that is to say, it was in the territory of the Gentiles, outside the land of Palestine. Our Lord threw emphasis on this detail (in His first public address) as being one of the earliest intimations of the favours which God purposed to extend unto the Gentiles, saying, “There were many widows in Israel” at that time (see Luk 4:25-26), who might (or might not) have gladly sheltered and succored the prophet, but unto none of them was he sent—what a severe reflection on the chosen nation to pass them by! But what is yet more remarkable is the fact that “Zidon” was the very place from which Jezebel, the wicked corrupter of Israel, had come (1Ki 16:31)! How passing strange are the ways of God! yet ever ordered by infinite wisdom. As good old Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says, “To show Jezebel the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding place for His servant even in her country.”

Equally striking is it to observe the particular person whom God selected to entertain Elijah. It was not a rich merchant or one of the chief men of Zidon, but a poor widow—desolate and dependent—who was made both willing and able to minister unto him. It is usually God’s way, and to His glory, to make use of and place honour upon “the weak and foolish things of this world.” In commenting upon the “ravens” which brought bread and flesh to the prophet while he sojourned by the brook, we called attention to the sovereignty of God and the strangeness of the instruments He is pleased to employ. The same truth is vividly illustrated here—a poor widow! a Gentile dwelling in Zidon, the original home of Jezebel! Think it not strange then, my reader, if God’s dealings with you have been the very opposite of what you had expected. The Lord is a law to Himself, and implicit trust and unreserved submission is what He requires from us.

“Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Ki 17:9). Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity—when Cherith is dried up then shall Zarephath be opened. How this should teach us to refrain from being concerned about the future. Remember, dear reader, that tomorrow will bring with it tomorrow’s God. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right

hand of my righteousness” (Isa 41:10). Make these sure and certain promises—for they are the Word of Him that cannot lie—the stay of your soul. Make them your reply to every question of unbelief and every foul aspersion of the devil. Observe that once more God sent Elijah not to a river but a “brook”—not to some wealthy person with great resources, but to a poor widow with scanty means. Ah, the Lord would have His servant remain a pensioner upon Himself and as much dependent on His power and goodness as before.

This was indeed a severe testing of Elijah, not only to take a long journey through the desert, but to enter into an experience which was entirely opposed to his natural feelings, his religious training, and spiritual inclinations—to be made dependent upon a Gentile in a heathen city. He was required to leave the land of his fathers and sojourn at the headquarters of Baal-worship. Let us duly weigh this truth that God’s plan for Elijah demanded from him unquestioning obedience. They who would walk with God must not only trust Him implicitly, but be prepared to be entirely regulated by His Word. Not only must our faith be trained by a great variety of providences, but our obedience by the divine commandments. Vain is it to suppose that we can enjoy the smile of JEHOVAH unless we be in subjection to His precepts. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1Sa 15:22). As quickly as we become disobedient, our communion with God is broken and chastisement becomes our portion.

Elijah must go and dwell at Zarephath. But how could he subsist there when he knew no one in that place? Why, the same One who had given him this order had also made arrangements for his reception and maintenance. “Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Ki 17:9). This does not necessarily mean that the Lord had acquainted her with His mind—the sequel plainly shows otherwise. Rather do we understand those words to signify that God had appointed it in His counsels and would effect it by His providences—compare His, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee” (1Ki 17:4). When God calls any of His people to go to a place, they may rest assured that He has fully provided for them in His fore-determined purpose. God secretly disposed this widow to receive and sustain His servant. All hearts are in the Lord’s hand and He turns them wheresoever He pleases. He can incline them to show us favour and do us acts of kindness even though we be strangers to them. Many times, in widely different parts of the world, has this been the experience of this writer.

Not only was the faith and obedience of Elijah tested by God’s call for him to go to Zarephath, but his humility was also put to the proof. He was called to receive charity at the hands of a desolate widow. How humbling to pride to be made dependent upon one of the poorest of the poor. How withering to all self-confidence and self-sufficiency to accept relief from one who did not appear to have sufficient for her own urgent needs. Ah, it takes pressure of circumstances to make us bow to what is repugnant to our natural inclinations. More than once in the past did we feel it acutely to receive gifts and succor from those who had very little of this world’s goods, but we were comforted by that word, “And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities....and many others which ministered unto him of their substance” (Luk 8:2-3). The “widow” speaks of weakness and desolation. Israel was widowed at this time and therefore Elijah was made to feel it in his own soul.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath” (1Ki 17:10). In this Elijah gave proof that he was indeed the servant of God, for the path of a servant is the path of obedience—let him forsake that path and he ceases to be a servant. The servant and obedience are as inseparably linked together as the workman and work. Many today talk about their service for Christ as though He needed their assistance, as though His cause would not prosper unless they patronized and furthered it—as though the holy ark must inevitably fall to the ground unless their unholy hands uphold it. This is

all wrong, seriously wrong—the product of Satan-fed pride. What is so much needed (by us!) is service to Christ—submission to His yoke, surrender to His will, subjection to His commandments. Any “Christian service” other than walking in His precepts is a human invention, fleshly energy, “strange fire.”

“So he arose and went to Zarephath” (1Ki 17:10). How can I minister the holy things of God unless I be myself treading the path of obedience? The Jew of Paul’s day was very self-important, yet he brought no glory unto God. “And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish” (Rom 2:19-20). And then the apostle puts him to the test, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?” (Rom 2:21). The principle there enunciated is a searching one and one of wide application. By it each of us who preach the Gospel should diligently measure himself. You that preach that God requires truth in the inwards parts, are you a man of your word? You that teach we should provide things honest in the sight of all men, have you any unpaid debts? You that exhort believers to be importunate in prayer, spend you much time in the secret place? If not, be not surprised if your sermons meet with little response.

From the pastoral peace of Gilead to the exacting ordeal of confronting the king—from the presence of Ahab to the solitude of Cherith—from the dried-up brook to Zarephath—the disturbances and displacements of Providence are a necessity if our spiritual lives are to prosper. “Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel” (Jer 48:11). The figure used here is very suggestive. Because Moab had long been at peace she had become lethargic and flabby. Or like grape juice unrefined, she had been spoilt. God was emptying Elijah “from vessel to vessel” so that the scum might rise to the surface and be removed. This stirring of our nest, this constant changing of our circumstances, is not a pleasant experience, but it is essential if we are to be preserved from “settling on our lees.” But alas, so far from appreciating the gracious designs of the Refiner, how often we are petulant and murmur when He empties us from vessel to vessel.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath” (1Ki 17:10). He made no demur, but did as he was told. He made no delay, but set off on his long and unpleasant journey at once. He was as ready to go on foot as though God had provided a chariot. He was as ready to cross a desert as if God had bidden him luxuriate in a shady garden. He was as ready to apply for succor from a Gentile widow as if God had told him to return to his friends in Gilead. It might appear to carnal reason that he was putting his head into the lion’s mouth—courting certain disaster by making for the land of Zidon, where the agents of Jezebel would be numerous. But since God had bidden him to go, it was right for him to comply (and wrong not to do so), and therefore he could count upon the divine protection.

Let it be duly noted that the Lord gave Elijah no more information as to his future residence and maintenance than that it was to be at Zarephath and by a widow. In a time of famine we should be profoundly thankful that the Lord provides for us at all, and be quite content to leave the mode of doing so with Him. If the Lord undertakes to guide us in our life’s journey, we must be satisfied with His doing it step by step. It is rarely His way to reveal to us much beforehand. In most cases we know little or nothing in advance. How can it be otherwise if we are to walk by faith! We must trust Him implicitly for the full development of His plan concerning us. But if we are really walking with God, taking heed to our ways according to His Word, He will gradually make things plain. His providences will clear up our difficulties, and what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Thus it was with Elijah.

# THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY

## *3. Its Nature*

Spiritual good is holiness, and holiness consists of supreme love of God and equal love of men. Fallen man, alone and of himself, is utterly unable to love God with all his soul and strength and his neighbour as himself. This principle of holy love is completely absent from his heart, nor can he by any effort beget such an affection within himself. He is utterly unable to originate within his will any inclination or disposition that is spiritually good. He has not the moral power to do so. Moral power is nothing more nor less than a holy nature with holy dispositions. It is the perception of the beauty and the response of the heart to the excellence and glory of God, and the consequent subjection of the will to His royal law of liberty. "Spiritual perceptions, spiritual delight, spiritual choice, these and these alone, constitute ability to good" (James H. Thornwell, 1812-1862).

In our efforts to carefully define and describe the precise character of fallen man's inability to do anything which is pleasing to God, we have shown, first, that the impotency under which he now labours is a penal one, judicially inflicted upon him by the righteous Judge of all the earth, because of his misuse of the faculties and strength with which he was originally endowed in Adam. Second, that his spiritual helplessness is a moral one, having its seat in the soul or moral nature. The principle of holiness was lost by man when he apostatized from his Maker and Governor, and the principle of sin entered his soul, corrupting the whole of his being, so that he is no longer capable of rendering any spiritual obedience to the Moral Law—that is, obeying it from spiritual motives and with spiritual designs.

We pass on now to show, third, that fallen man's inability is a voluntary one. Some of our readers who have no difficulty in following us thus far, are likely to demur here—though the great majority, we doubt not, will apprehend this article more easily than the two preceding ones. We refer to hyper-Calvinists who have such a one-sided conception of man's spiritual helplessness that, really, they have lapsed into serious error. They look upon the condition and case of the sinner much as they do those people who have suffered a stroke which has paralyzed their limbs—as a calamity and not the result of a crime—as something which necessitates a state of inertia and inactivity, as something which annuls their responsibility. They fail to see that the moral impotency of the natural man is a deliberate one, and therefore one which is highly culpable.

Before appealing to the Scriptures for proofs of this third point, we must explain the sense in which we use our term. In affirming that the moral and sinful inability of fallen man is a voluntary one, we mean that he acts freely and spontaneously, unforced either from within or without. This is an essential element of an accountable being, everywhere recognized and acknowledged among men. Human law (much less divine) does not hold a person to be guilty if he has been compelled by others to do wrong against his own will and protests. In all moral action the human will is self-inclined, acting freely according to the dictates of the mind, which are in turn regulated by the inclinations of the heart. Though the mind be darkened and the heart corrupted, nevertheless, the will acts freely and the individual remains a voluntary agent.

Some of the best theologians have drawn a distinction between the "liberty" and "ability" of the sinner's will, affirming the former but denying the latter. We believe this distinction to be an accurate and helpful one. Unless a person be free to exercise volitions as he pleases, he would not be an accountable being. Nevertheless, fallen man cannot, by any exercise of will, change his

nature or make any choice contrary to the governing tendencies of indwelling sin. He is totally lacking any disposition to meet the requirements of the Moral Law and therefore he cannot make himself willing to so do. The affections of the heart and the perceptions of the mind regulate our volitions and the will has no inherent power to change our affections. We cannot by any resolution however strong or prolonged, make ourselves love what we hate or hate what we love.

Because the sinner acts without any external compulsion, acts according to his own inclinations, his mind is free to consider and weigh the various motives which come before it, making its own preferences or choices. By “motives” we mean those reasons or inducements which are presented to the mind tending to lead to choice and action. The power or force of these “inducements” lie not in themselves (abstractedly considered), but in the state of the person who is the subject of them. Consequently, that which would be a powerful motive in the view of one mind, would have no weight at all in the view of another. For example, the offer of a bribe would be a sufficient motive to induce one judge to decide a case contrary to law and against the evidence, whereas to another such an offer, so far from being a motive to such an evil course, would be highly repulsive.

Let this be clearly grasped by the reader—those external inducements which are presented to the mind affect a person according to the state of his or her heart. The temptation presented by Potiphar’s wife, which was firmly refused by Joseph, would have been a motive of sufficient power to have ruined many a youth of less purity of heart. External motives can have no influence over the choice and conduct of men except as they make an appeal to desires already existing in the mind. Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder and there is at once an explosion, but throw that match into a barrel of water and no harm is done. “The Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30) said the Holy One of God—none among the children of men can make such a claim.

All the affections of the human heart are, in their very nature, free. The idea of compelling a man to love or hate any object is manifestly absurd. The same holds good of all his faculties. Conscience may be enlightened and made more sensitive, or it may be resisted and hardened, but no man can be compelled to act contrary to its dictates without depriving him of his freedom and at the same time of his responsibility. So of his will or volition. Two or more alternatives confront a man, conflicting motives are presented to his mind, and his will is quite free in making a preference or choice between them. Nevertheless, it is the very nature of his will to choose that which is preferable, that which is most agreeable to his heart. Consequently, though the will acts freely, it is biased by the corruptions of the heart, and therefore is unable to choose spiritual good. The heart must be changed before the will chooses God.

Against our assertion that the spiritual impotency of fallen man is a voluntary one, it may be objected that the sinner is so strongly tempted, so powerfully influenced by Satan, and is so thoroughly under his control, that (in many instances, at least) he cannot help himself, being irresistibly drawn into sinning. That there is some force in this objection is readily granted, but the length to which it is carried we can by no means allow. However subtle the craft, however influential the sophistry, however great be the power of the devil, yet these must not be used so as to repudiate our personal responsibility and criminality in sinning, nor must we construe ourselves into being Satan’s innocent dupes or unwilling victims. Never does Scripture so represent the matter, rather are we there told “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam 4:7), and if we seek grace to meet the conditions (specified in 1 Peter 5:8-9), then God will assuredly make good His promise.

Satan's power is not physical, but moral. He has an intimate access to the faculties of our souls, and though he cannot (like the Holy Spirit) work at their roots so as to change and transform their tendencies, he can ply them with representations and delusions which effectually incline them to will and do according to his good pleasure. He can cheat the understanding with appearances of truth, fascinate the fancy with pictures of beauty, and mock the heart with semblances of good. By a secret suggestion he can give an impulse to our thoughts and turn them into channels which subserve the purposes of his malignity. But in all of this he does no violence to the laws of our nature. He disturbs neither the spontaneity of the understanding nor the freedom of the will. He cannot make us do a thing without our own consent, and in consenting to his evil suggestions lies our guilt.

That sinners act freely and voluntarily in all their wrong-doing is everywhere taught in the Scriptures. Take first of all the horrible state of the heathen, a dark picture of which is painted for us in the first chapter of Romans. There we behold the consummation of human depravity. Heathenism, be it stated, is the full development of the principle of sin in its workings upon the intellectual, moral, and religious nature of man. In Romans 1, we are shown that the dreadful condition in which the heathen now lie (and missionaries bear clear witness that what comes before their notice accurately corresponds to what is here stated) is the consequence of their own voluntary choice. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God" (Rom 1:21). They "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man" etc. (Rom 1:23). They "changed the truth of God into a lie" (Rom 1:25). They "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Rom 1:28).

Nor was it any different with the favoured people of Israel. So averse were they to God and His ways that they hated, persecuted, and slew those messengers which He sent to reclaim them from their wickedness. "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law" (Psa 78:10). They said, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (Jer 2:25). "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken" (Jer 6:16-17). The Lord called unto them, but they "refused." He stretched forth His hand, but "no man regarded." They set at nought all His counsel, and would none of His reproofs (Pro 1:24-25). "The LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending...But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2Ch 36:15-16).

Nor did God's blessed Son receive any better treatment at their hands. Though He appeared before them in "the form of a servant" (Phi 2:7). He suited not their proud hearts. Though He was "full of grace and truth" (Joh 1:14), they despised and rejected Him. Though He sought only their good, they returned Him nothing but evil. Though He proclaimed glad tidings unto them, they refused to hearken thereto. Though He wrought the most wonderful miracles before them, yet they would not believe Him. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (Joh 1:11). Their language was, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luk 19:14). It was a voluntary and deliberate refusal of Him. It is this very voluntariness of their sin which shall be charged against them in the day of judgment, for then shall He give orders, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before me" (Luk 19:27).

And from whence did such wicked treatment of the Son of God proceed? Why, from the vile corruptions of their own hearts. "They hated me without a cause," (Joh 15:25) declared the

incarnate Son of God. There was absolutely nothing whatever either in His character or conduct which merited their wicked contempt and enmity. Did anyone force them to be of such an abominable disposition? Surely not—they were hearty in it. Were they forced to such vileness against their wills? No indeed. They were voluntary in their wicked hatred of Christ. They loved darkness. They were infatuated by their corruptions and delighted in gratifying the same. They were highly-pleased with false prophets, because they preached in their favour, flattering them and gratifying their evil hearts. And they hated whatever was disagreeable to their depraved tastes and which condemned their evil ways.

It was the same with those who heard the ambassadors of Christ—except for those in whom a sovereign God wrought a miracle of grace. Jews and Gentiles alike willfully opposed and rejected the Gospel. In some cases their hatred of the truth was less openly manifested than in others, nevertheless it was just as real. And their disrelish of and opposition to the Gospel was entirely voluntary on the part of its enemies. Did not the Jewish leaders act freely when they threw Peter and John into prison? Did not the murderers of Stephen act freely when they “stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord?” (Act 7:57). Did not the Philippians act freely when they “rose up together” against Paul and Silas, beat, and cast them into prison?

The same thing obtains everywhere today. If the Gospel of Christ is preached in its purity and all its glory, it gains not the regard of the masses who hear it. Instead, as soon as the sermon is over, like the generality of the Jews in our Lord’s day, they “made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise” (Mat 22:5). They are too indifferent to seek after obtaining even a doctrinal knowledge of the truth. There are many who regard this sottishness of the unsaved as mere indifference, but it is actually something far worse—it is dislike of the heart for God, deliberate opposition to Him. “They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely” (Psa 58:4-5). As Paul declared in his day, “The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted” (Act 28:27).

“They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” (Job 21:14). Such is the desperately wicked state of man’s heart—diametrically opposite to the divine excellence. Yet when this solemn truth is pressed upon the unregenerate, many of them will strongly object, denying that there is any such obstinacy in their hearts, saying, I have never hated God, but have always loved Him. Thus do they flatter themselves and seek to make themselves out to be far otherwise than they are. Nor are they wittingly lying when they make such a claim, rather are they utterly misled by their deceitful hearts. The scribes and Pharisees verily thought that they loved God, and that had they lived in the days of their forefathers, they had not put the prophets to death (Mat 23:29-30). They were altogether insensible to their fearful and inveterate enmity against God—nevertheless it was there, and later unmistakably displayed itself, when they hounded the Son of God to death.

And why was it that the scribes and Pharisees were quite unconscious of the opposition of their hearts to the divine nature? It was because they had erroneous notions of the divine Being, and loved only that false image which they had framed in their own imaginations. And therefore they had false conceptions of the prophets which their fathers hated and murdered, and hence supposed they would have loved them. But when God was manifested in Christ they hated Him with bitter hatred. In like manner, there are multitudes of sinners at ease in Zion today, millions in Christendom who persuade themselves that they truly love God, when in reality they hate Him. And the hardest of all tasks confronting the ministers of Christ is to shatter this cherished delusion

and bring their unsaved hearers face to face with the horrible reality of their unspeakably vile condition.

Loudly as our deluded fellow-creatures may now boast of their loving of the divine nature, as soon as they pass out of time into eternity and discover what God is, their spurious love immediately vanishes and their enmity bursts forth in full force. Sinners today perceive not their contrariness to the divine nature, because they are utterly ignorant of the true God. It must be so, for a sinful nature and holy nature are diametrically opposite. Christendom has invented a false “God”—a “God” without any sovereign choice, a “God” who loves all mankind, a “God” whose justice is swallowed up in His mercy.

Were they acquainted with the God of Holy Writ—who “hatest all workers of iniquity” (Psa 5:5), who will one day appear “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2Th 1:8-9)—they, if they honestly examined their hearts, would be conscious of the hatred they bear Him.

## **PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS**

“Forgive us our sins” (Luk 11:4). In view of a serious error which has been accepted by not a few professing Christians, we feel that a more detailed consideration of these words is needed than we were able to give them in our current article on Matthew 6:9-13. This error is that it is wrong for believers to ask God to pardon their sins, that it is highly dishonouring to Christ for them to do so. It may strike most of our readers as strange that any who claim to be the Lord’s people should object to the using of this petition in the family prayer—their own spiritual instincts (a burdened conscience seeking relief and a tender heart grieved over offending a gracious God) and the clear testimony of Scripture thereon should prevent such a foolish mistake. Yet there are those who insist that a justified person ought not to pray for the pardon of his sins, since this is what God has already granted him.

Those errorists to whom we are here alluding suppose that it is as unnecessary and absurd for them to now ask God to forgive their trespasses as it would be to make request that He should choose them to eternal life, or that Christ should now render satisfaction (make an atonement) to divine justice for the sins of His people, which He has already done. Now it is a glorious fact that the believer in Christ has been “justified from all things” (Act 13:39) and that he “shall not come into condemnation” (Joh 5:24). Nevertheless these blessed declarations of the Gospel must not be used so as to nullify other aspects of the truth equally important and vital, “having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13) must not be interpreted in a manner which sets aside, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). Any difficulty which the reader may experience at this point will disappear if it be borne in mind that no such idea is presented anywhere in the Scriptures as a pardon of all sins, past, present, and to come.

Before turning to the constructive side of our subject, let us seek to point out wherein the above error lies. First, it is due to confounding the purpose of God with the actual execution of the same. That all the sins of believers are pardoned in the everlasting counsels of God is blessedly true, yet our sins are not actually pardoned until we repent of the same. God determined to create from all eternity, but that determination was only realized when “In the beginning” (Gen

1:1) of time, the heavens and the earth were actually brought into existence. God decreed the regeneration of His people, who suffered spiritual death in Adam, yet that decree is only made effectual when they are personally born again. In like manner, God willed the remission of all the sins of His people, but that decree is executed gradually, daily—as they sin and repent of the same. To talk of eternal justification or forgiveness is as senseless as to speak of eternal creation or regeneration.

Second, the above error grows out of a failure to distinguish between the impetration of Christ's atonement and the application of the same unto believers. Throughout His life, and particularly so in His death, the Lord Jesus made full and perfect satisfaction unto divine justice on behalf of all His people's liabilities, but when do they actually enter into the good of the same? By nature they are "the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph 2:3). On the other hand, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), but we enter Christ by a new creation (2Co 5:17)—it is only then that we gain access to the riches of the spiritual realm. Even then, we have to sue out our interest in Christ. There is now "a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of [the heavenly] Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1)—to that fountain we need to have continual recourse that we may be washed from our uncleanness.

Third, the above error arises from a failure to perceive the way wherein God gives pardon. This is not only in a way of grace, but of holiness, too. In the pardoning of sin the Lord never makes light of its enormity. Very much to the contrary. The cross of Calvary makes unmistakably evident the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of heaven. Nor is that all. It is the special office of the Holy Spirit to convict the sinner of the heinousness of his rebellion against God, and this He does by enlightening his understanding, softening his heart, and searching his conscience. In God's light we are given to see light, so that the vileness of our condition and the excuselessness of our conduct is borne in upon us. The result is that we are pierced to the quick, made to mourn for our transgressions against a holy and gracious God, and are brought to genuine repentance before Him. Then are we in a fit state to receive His mercy.

The testimony of Scripture is harmonious throughout that repentance on the part of the sinner ever precedes the actual bestowment of pardon by God. "If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant" (Lev 26:40-42). "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long....I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid....And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa 32:3, 5). "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy" (see Pro 28:13). "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Act 3:19). "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Act 8:22). Alas that such verses as these have no place in most of the "evangelistic" activity of our day. Alas that so few of God's own people are now being taught that He requires them to daily renew their repentance.

God will not suffer His saints to lie down in their sins as the sow does in the mire. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mat 6:12). On a previous occasion, we have called attention to the significant fact that this petition in the family prayer opens with the word "And," thus connecting it with the previous request, "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us" (Mat 6:11). Among other things this teaches us that we are just as much in need of daily

forgiveness as we are of daily sustenance. The best of God's children is not so fully sanctified in this life but there is still that in him which needs divine pardon, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc 7:20)—both by omission and commission. Even though by grace we have a conscience void of offense both toward God and man, nevertheless we still need to pray, "Cleanse thou me from secret [unknown] faults" (Psa 19:12).

It is plain from Holy Writ that it has been the practice of the saints in all ages to pray for the pardon of their sins. To mention but two cases, David prayed, "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11), yet in this very Psalm we find him expressing himself as a justified person, "O my God, I trust in thee....thou art the God of my salvation" (Psa 25:2, 5). Again we find him praying, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psa 51:1), and this after having received a definite intimation from God through Nathan, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin" (2Sa 12:13). So, too, Daniel made request, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive" (Dan 9:19). To these may be added all those passages where believers prayed for salvation, which necessarily included an asking for the pardon of sins.

Let us now carefully inquire as to what it is we beg for when we ask for the forgiveness of our sins. First, for the grant of a divine pardon. It is true that our justification may rightly be considered as an immanent act in the mind of God, that is, that from eternity He purposed not to impute sin unto His people. Nevertheless Christ's righteousness is not applied unto them until they repent and believe. In this connection, it is striking to note that Paul, when in a justified state, expressed his earnest desire, "That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God" (Phi 3:8-9). The Lord Jesus made a perfect satisfaction unto God which was accepted by Him, and therefore He was entitled to be received into heaven and there administer His mediatory kingdom. Yet God required Him to sue out the fruits of His purchase, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance" (Psa 2:8). And so we are to ask for our right, "I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa 32:5). What consequence is to be drawn? This, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee" (Psa 32:6).

Though God be so ready to forgive yet He requires us to call upon Him and seek this (as all other blessings) at His hand. Why so? Because He deals with us as a Sovereign, and therefore does He require an humble submission from us, seeking in the terms of grace. Christ was not a Mediator of our choosing, but of God's, and therefore though justice has been fully satisfied yet the debt must be sincerely and contritely owned by us. Moreover, in our begging for divine mercy we are to confess our own misery and poverty, that we are utterly unable to make any satisfaction ourselves. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jo 2:1), and God requires us to acknowledge our complete dependence upon the advocacy of Christ. Though God provided a remedy for the bitten Israelites, yet in order to benefit therefrom they must look unto the brazen serpent (Num 21:8). So it is with us now.

In this asking of God to grant us a pardon for Christ's sake we make request that He would not lay to our charge those sins which we daily commit, saying with the Psalmist, "enter not into judgment with thy servant" (Psa 143:2), for Thou hast entered into judgment with Thy Son and laid upon Him all the iniquities of Thy people. "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark [Hebrew—"impute"] iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa 130:3-4). We therefore pray that God would not visit upon us the punishment which our transgressions deserve, but that on the ground of Christ's sacrifice it may

be remitted us. This petition also includes the request that it may please God to spare us the governmental consequences of our sins, and that He will restore us unto full communion with Himself.

Second, in praying for the forgiveness of our sins we ask for a continuation of God's pardon. As in connection with the supply of our temporal needs, we ask for a continuance of daily bread (even though our larder is well-stocked), so we make request for a continuance of pardoning mercy. Sin still indwells us and the effects are not done away till we make our exit from this world. Often accusations of conscience for past sins come upon us, so that we are (for our further humbling) made to "possess the iniquities of our youth" (see Job 13:26), and this makes us long for a renewal of this divine benefit. "Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD" (Psa 25:6-7). Thus David begged that God's past mercies might continue with him.

Third, we thereby make humble request for the assurance and comfort of our pardon. Strictly speaking, this is an effect or fruit of forgiveness, yet is this specially desired by the penitent believer, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" and "access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom 5:1-2). This is a manifestation of and realization in our hearts of the pardoning mercy of God, that we may have a comfortable sense of being washed from our sins by the precious blood of the Lamb. It is one thing for God to blot sins out of His book of remembrance, it is another for Him to remove them from our conscience. It is an additional blessing when we are "sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22). David prayed for this when he said, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice....Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psa 51:8, 12).

## WELCOME TIDINGS

"Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isa 26:4). Four things are to be noted in this exhortation—the Object of our trust, the constancy of such trust, the reason therefor, and the blessed effect. The One to whom we must look for the supply of every need is the great JEHOVAH, the Self-existent and Self-sufficient One. The duration of our trust is to be "for ever"—at all times and under all circumstances—in seasons of darkness and distress, of weakness and old age, in hours when all appears to be hopeless. "For in JEHOVAH is everlasting strength." We are not asked to put our trust in a feeble and vacillating object who will fail us, but in One who is the possessor of infinite and eternal might. The effect of such trust, as the previous verse affirms, will be that "perfect peace" is our portion.

Now one of the chief means and aids to trusting in the Lord is for the mind to dwell upon and the heart to be occupied with His omnipotence. "Power belongeth unto God" (Psa 62:11). Not a single creature in the universe has any power whatever save that which the Almighty imparts to him. But power belongs unto God inherently, and not by delegation or acquirement. It is one of His distinctive excellencies, as much so as His holiness or wisdom. So great is His power that nothing is impossible to Him. His might is displayed throughout the material realm—in the creating and sustaining of the heavenly bodies, the ruling of the seas, the fructifying of the land, and equally so in the devastating tornadoes and earthquakes, which should make us tremble before Him.

But the power of God shines forth most illustriously in the new creation, where He brings a clean thing out of an unclean. Yet this is not so apparent to our senses, and even believers are much slower to perceive it. This is clear from the apostle's prayer, "That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward" (see Eph 1:19). Very striking indeed is this. When Paul spoke of God's might and majesty in the old creation, he mentioned "His power and Godhead" (Rom 1:20), but when he refers to His working in grace and salvation, he terms it, "the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph 1:19). God proportions His power to the character of the work in hand. For example, the casting out of demons is ascribed to His "finger" (Luk 11:20), His delivering of Israel from Egypt is attributed to His "hand" (Exo 13:9), but when the Lord saves a sinner it is His "holy arm" which is said to give "Him the victory" (Psa 98:1-2).

"Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isa 26:4). The heart's contemplation of the mighty power of God must indeed deepen our confidence in Him. It was the ground of Abraham's assurance when he said to his servants, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen 22:5). Though he had received command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, yet he proceeded to the altar "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb 11:19). It was the ground of the three Hebrews' confidence, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us" (Dan 3:17). Yea, it was the ground of the Saviour's confidence, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death" (Heb 5:7). Nothing is so well-calculated to dispel our fears and strengthen our hearts as a believing apprehension of God's strength and sufficiency.

He who brought a nation across the Red Sea without any ships, and sustained them in the wilderness for forty years, still lives and reigns. Is not that welcome tidings! And do we not need to remind ourselves of this grand fact again and again in the trying days through which we are passing? It is only by the gracious power of God that this little monthly messenger is still being sent forth. To His praise be it recorded that we have encountered no obstacle from the censor in sending it to foreign lands. To His praise be it recorded that there has been no falling off in funds. To His praise be it recorded that, so far as we are aware, not a single letter intended for us or a single copy of "Studies" mailed out by us has failed to reach its destination safely. Great is the power of our God. Let the following quotations from letters to hand be viewed as further examples of the workings of His mighty power.

"How helpful the 'Studies' have been, especially your very practical messages on the Sermon on the Mount, which I have been teaching to a class of men. The tragedy of it being that this section of God's Word is so neglected, and very rarely preached or taught by Bible teachers in this country. We realize with you the truth contained in your December editorial, and desire more and more that the majority of Christians would put first things first" (Preacher in U.S.A.). "I should like to have been under your personal ministry, because I think you would be able to correct and instruct me. Never, so far as I can recall, had I been taught anything about my daily walk until I met you through your letters and 'Studies' " (U.S.A. and he had a full course in a "Bible Institute")!

"I cannot refrain from expressing my deep regret that there is any thought of your discontinuing the 'Studies.' Where, oh where, are we to receive spiritual ministry? We do not get it from the pulpit any more. Good, sound expository books are fast going out of print. The great bulk of religious papers today have very little real food to offer. I can only plead with you to continue on for the sake of the few who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. To me the

‘Studies’ is worth more than all the religious magazines I know of put together” (North Dakota). “I find your ‘Studies’ invaluable. They show the consistency of parts with the whole. You give the entire glory to Him to whom it wholly belongs. You stimulate investigation, and ‘give the sense’—Nehemiah 8:8” (Australia).

“The truth contained in ‘Studies’ is certainly not wanted by the mass of professing Christians today. They may be objected to, but cannot be denied. What I like especially in all your articles is, you put forth nothing but what is proved by Scripture quotations. And I trust you may be enabled to carry on the Lord’s work” (Scotland). “Thank you for the ‘Studies.’ They have been a blessing to me and I hope to others also. It is just what God’s children need these days—searching of the heart and conscience—but not very welcome. Lord, help me to walk in the truth before Thee” (Los Angeles). “I want to express my gratitude for the Studies—the warnings, instructions, encouragement, and spiritual uplift that they give” (Preacher in U.S.A.). “I have been much interested and edified by your articles on the ‘Lord’s Prayer.’ A dispensational teaching which narrows our Father’s messages to us has done much mischief” (England).

“With grateful thanks I enclose contribution to ‘Studies.’ They continue to be most searching and helpful” (New Zealand), “We never cease to thank our God for your magazine and ask that it may be His will to spare you both to carry it on faithfully. I am sure there are hundreds who feel as I do, and have been as tardy as I in writing to say so” (Australia). “The magazine is indeed full of good things! How often one is made to sigh! I enjoy them most because they exalt a precious Saviour and put the sinner in his proper place” (Lancaster). “Many times have I lifted up my heart in thanksgiving to our gracious God for the help received from the Studies. My earnest prayer is that you may continue to be led by the Holy Spirit” (Preacher). “I have been reading the Studies now for ten years, and I thank the Lord for them. They are solid spiritual food” (Australia).

“I get so much help from your articles, but my heart is grieved because I can find none with whom I can have fellowship in these good things. I would love to talk with someone who believes the truth of election, but I do not dare to mention it, for professors will not accept God’s Word thereon” (Colorado). “Once again I praise God He has enabled you to carry on with the good work. I can truly say blessing has come to my soul and others. What we most need in these dark days is that which brings us low before God, and your articles have, by God’s grace, produced this very effect” (Preacher). “The Studies on Heart Adultery are most necessary, so plainly exposing sin as they do—which is the work of a true servant of God” (Australia). “Thank you for your magazines which are real Studies indeed. They are a continued help and blessing and many portions of God’s Word have been opened up to me by them” (Wales).

“I have enjoyed reading the ‘Studies’ in these days of so much superficial ministry both by pen and word. I was so glad to read in the December number of the need to return to sound practical teaching and leave the piecing together of present events to fit the prophetic picture alone. There is certainly too much of it at the present time and to my mind only causes a carnal interest and fails to feed faith” (Scotland). “I can say Amen to your timely words on not teaching prophecy to young people” (English Preacher). “Your writings are in very strong contrast to the bulk of religious magazines of today. Even so-called ‘Calvinistic’ magazines are often full of the writings of men long since dead—good in themselves, but not suitable to form the principle contents of a magazine—or else the articles just skim the surface” (Kent). “Studies mean a great deal to me. There is so much food for thought, as well as that which stirs the heart and causes one to take inventory and to say, ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart’” (U.S.A.).

“I wish to thank you for the help and encouragement received from ‘Studies.’ I often bemoan the money wasted on worldly lusts, and wish it were in my power to convert it to His cause”

(Canada). “I look forward to each issue with much eagerness and it is my earnest prayer that nothing will hinder its continuance” (Washington). “I enjoy your ‘Studies’ next to my Bible. As one gets older he wants something different from information for the mind. He wants something that touches the heart, something to wound and then to heal, and I get these in the ‘Studies’” (Canada).

Thankful to say all is well with us. To God be all the praise.—A. W. and V. E. Pink.



# August

## **THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL**

The Gospel evidences itself to be divine because it enunciates that which the mind of man could not possibly have originated. The grand truths which it proclaims are without any parallel or rival among all the schemes of human wisdom. Pre-eminently is this the case with the full-orbed Gospel of God. Alas, with scarcely an exception it is at best an attenuated Gospel which is being preached today—preaching that leaves out some of the most striking, unique, and blessed features. Let the glorious tidings of redemption be told out in all their simplicity and yet profundity, their Scriptural perspicuity and perspective, and those who truly receive these glad tidings into their hearts unitedly acknowledge that it is neither exaggeration nor extravagance to designate them the Glorious Gospel. Nothing so honours and magnifies God, nothing so rejoices and satisfies believers.

Now here and there throughout the Scriptures the Spirit has graciously furnished us with brief compendiums of evangelical truth, comprising within the scope of a single verse the essential elements of the whole plan and way of salvation. Luther was wont to call these compendiums “miniature Gospels.” Such a one we have in, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). This verse sets forth in most decisive language the vicarious sufferings of Christ, as the satisfaction offered by Him to divine justice for the sins of His people; the imputation of His perfect obedience unto believers as their title to eternal life; and the real deity of Him whose righteousness becomes theirs for justification by virtue of their union with Him. These grand truths could not be expressed more clearly and tersely.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). This is one of the most profound and most comprehensive statements to be found in all the Scriptures concerning the atonement. Into it is compressed a whole treatise of theology, and therefore each clause, yea every word in it, calls for separate and close consideration. As we examine this most solemn and yet blessed declaration, we find there are three things said therein respecting God the Father, three things predicated of God the Son in His mediatorial capacity, and three things concerning His people. So we propose to take up the contents of our passage in this order. May the heart of writer and reader alike be divinely prepared to ponder the same, for something superior to intellectual acumen is needed when contemplating spiritual things.

The three things here mentioned of God the Father are His high sovereignty, His inflexible justice, and His amazing grace. His sovereignty is affirmed in the words, “He hath made him to be sin for us” (2Co 5:21). and therein His supremacy appears at three points. First, in the person

He selected for this extraordinary transaction, namely, the Son. None but the Father possessed the right and authority to assign the Son for this awful undertaking. He alone could appoint Him to that work. As the God-man, Christ was the Servant of the Father, and in ordaining Him to the task of making expiation for sin, He demonstrated His high and absolute sovereignty over all persons and creatures. No man, no angel, no cherub or seraph—only the Son Himself was singled out.

The sovereignty of God the Father appears, second, in the unique legal arrangement or constitution here alluded to—that He who was without sin should be dealt with as a sinner, and that those who were sinners should be allowed to go free of suffering their just deserts. None but He who is absolute sovereign above all can dispense the law according to His own imperial good pleasure. Third, the sovereignty of the Father appears in the ones selected to be the beneficiaries of this unparalleled arrangement. Christ was not made sin for all of Adam's race, for all mankind are not made the righteousness of God in Him. It was the sovereignty of God which elected the persons who were to be everlastingly indebted to Christ's atoning work. Thus the whole foundation of this amazing transaction lay in the absolute sovereignty of God the Father over all persons and things, and before that sovereignty we should humbly and thankfully bow.

Next we behold here the inflexible justice of the Father. Scripture nowhere affirms that God was under any compulsion or moral necessity of saving His people as He did. It was solely by His mere sovereign good pleasure that He devised the method and means revealed in the Gospel. But having ordained that His Son should be "made under the law (Gal 4:4), then it was imperative that the demands of the law should be fully met. It was to this end that God sent forth His Son to be a propitiation for sin, to "declare his righteousness" (Rom 3:25). Thus, in a special manner His justice has been magnified by the death of Christ. True, God cannot act contrary to His own perfections, but the exercise of His justice, mercy, or any of His attributes, is regulated solely by His will. We must adhere strictly to the exact terms of Holy Writ. It is not, "that can by no means clear the guilty," but "that will by no means clear" them (Exo 34:7).

The amazing grace of the Father manifested itself in the aim or design of this transaction, namely, that His people might be freed from sin and constituted righteous before Him. Note carefully it is not said merely that Christ was "made sin for us," but "He hath made him to be sin for us" (2Co 5:21). Thus the grace of the victim is no more conspicuous than that of Him who furnished the altar of redemption with the foreordained Lamb. Though Christ was the Father's well-beloved, the One in whom His soul delighted (Isa 42:1), nevertheless out of unspeakable love for His people He ordained Him to be made a curse for them. O what stupendous grace that God, knowing our wretched condition, pitied us and resolved to reconcile us to Himself, by such a Priest and Sacrifice as became Him and was suited to us. O what gratitude and praise are due Him from us!

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *14. Prayer—Matthew 6:9-13*

It is only two years since we wrote a series of ten cover-page articles on what is usually designated the Lord's Prayer, and therefore we shall not now enter so fully into detail as we otherwise would have done. Before taking up its several clauses, let us make one or two general

observations on the prayer as a whole. First, we would note the words with which Christ prefaced it, “After this manner therefore pray ye” (Mat 6:9). This intimates that the Lord Jesus was supplying a pattern after which our prayers are to be modeled. So ignorant are we that, “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom 8:26), and therefore in answer to our oft-repeated request, “Lord, teach us to pray,” (Luk 11:1), He has graciously furnished the instruction we so sorely need, revealing the manner in which Christians should approach God, the order in which their requests should be presented, the things they most need to ask for, and the adoration which is due the One they are supplicating.

This model prayer is also found, in condensed form, in Luke’s Gospel, and there it is introduced by the words, “When ye pray, say” (Luk 11:2). This makes it clear that this prayer is not only a pattern to be copied, but also a form to be used verbatim, the plural pronouns therein suggesting it is appropriate for collective use when the saints assemble together. The fact that its use as a form has been perverted is no argument why it should never be thus employed. True, we need to be much on our guard against repeating it by rote, coldly and mechanically, and earnestly seek grace to recite it reverently and feelingly—in our judgment, once every public service—and always at family worship. In view of the class to whom we write, it is scarcely necessary to add that many have made a superstitious use of this prayer, as though it were a magical charm.

A few of our readers may have been disturbed by the foolish and harmful error that the Lord’s Prayer was not designed and is not suited for use in this dispensation—that instead, it is “Jewish” and intended for a godly remnant in some “great tribulation period” yet future. One would think that the very stating of such a fantasy is quite sufficient to expose its absurdity to those with any spiritual intelligence. Neither our Lord nor any of His apostles gave any warning that this prayer was not to be used by Christians or any intimation that it was designed for a future age. The fact that it is found in Luke’s Gospel as well as Matthew’s is clear indication it is to be employed by Jewish and Gentile saints alike. There is nothing whatever in this prayer which is unsuited to Christians now, yea, everything in it is needed by them. That it is addressed to “Our Father” furnishes all the warrant we need for it to be used by all the members of His family. Then let none of God’s children allow Satan to rob them of this valuable part of their birthright.

The more this blessed and wondrous prayer be pondered—one which we personally love to think of as “the Family Prayer”—the more will the perfect wisdom of its Author be apparent. Here we are taught both the manner and method of how to pray, and the matter for which to pray. Christ knew both our needs and the Father’s good will toward us, and therefore has He graciously supplied us with a simple but sufficient directory. Every aspect of prayer is included therein—adoration in its opening clause, thanksgiving at the close, confession of sin is implied. Its petitions are seven in number, showing the completeness of the outline here furnished us. It is virtually an epitome of the Psalms and a most excellent summary of all prayer. Every clause in it is taken from the Old Testament, denoting that our prayers cannot be acceptable unless they be Scriptural. “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14), and God’s will can only be learned from His Word.

“Our Father which art in heaven” (Mat 6:9). This opening clause presents to us the Object to whom we pray and the most endearing relation which He sustains to us. By directing us to address the great God as “our Father which art in heaven,” we are assured of His love and power—this precious title being designed to raise our affections, excite to reverential fear, and confirm our confidence in the efficacy of prayer. It is to a divine person, One who has our best interests at heart, we are invited to draw near, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us” (1Jo 3:1)! God is our “Father” first by creation, Malachi 2:10. Second, He is

our Father by covenant-relationship, and this by virtue of our federal union with Christ—because God is His Father, He is ours, John 20:17. Third, He is our Father by regeneration. When born again we are made “partakers of the divine nature,” Galatians 4:6; 2 Peter 1:4. O for faith to extract the sweetness of this relationship!

It is blessed to see how the Old Testament saints, at a time of peculiar trouble and distress, boldly pleaded this relationship to God. They declared, “Thou didst terrible things...behold thou art wroth.” They owned, “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” They acknowledged, “Thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities.” And then they pleaded, “But now, O LORD, thou art our Father” (Isa 64:3 8). Though we have conducted ourselves very undutifully and ungratefully toward You, yet we are Your dear children. Though You have chastened us sorely, nevertheless, You are still our Father. To You, therefore, we now in penitence turn, to You we would apply ourselves in prayer, for to whom should we look for succor and relief but from our Father! That was the language of faith.

“Our Father” (Mat 6:9). This teaches us to recognize the Christian brotherhood, to pray for the whole family and not for ourselves only. We must express our love for the brethren by praying for them. We are to be as much concerned about their needs as we are over our own. “Which art in heaven” (Mat 6:4). Here we are reminded of God’s greatness, of His infinite elevation above us. If the words “Our Father” inspire confidence and love, “which art in heaven” should fill us with humility and awe. It is true that God is everywhere, but He is present in heaven in a special sense. It is there that He has “prepared his throne” (Psa 103:19)—not only His throne of government, by which His kingdom rules over all, but also His throne of grace to which we must by faith draw near. We are to eye Him as God in heaven, in contrast from the false gods which dwell in temples made by hands.

These words, “which art in heaven” (Mat 6:9), should serve as a guide to direct us in our praying. Heaven is a high and exalted place, and we should address ourselves to God as One who is infinitely above us. It is the place of prospect, and we must picture His holy eye upon us. It is a place of ineffable purity, and nothing which defiles or makes a lie can enter there. It is the “firmament of his power,” and we must depend upon Him as the One to whom all might belongs. When the Lord Jesus prayed, He “lifted up his eyes to heaven” (Joh 17:1), directing us where to obtain the blessings we need. If God is in heaven, then prayer needs to be a thing of the heart and not of the lips, for no physical voice on earth can rend the skies, but sighs and groans will reach the ear of God. If we are to pray to God in heaven, then our souls must be detached from all of earth. If we pray to God in heaven, then faith must wing our petitions. Since we pray to God in heaven, our desires and aspirations must be heavenly.

“Hallowed be thy name” (Mat 6:9). Thus begins the petitionary part of this blessed prayer. The requests are seven in number, being divided into a three and a four. The first three concerning God and last four (ever the number of the creature), our own selves—similarly are the Ten Commandments divided—the first five treating of our duty Godward (in the fifth the parent stands to the child in the place of God), the last five our duty manwards. How clearly, then, is the fundamental duty in prayer here set forth. Self and all its needs must be given a secondary place and the Lord freely accorded the pre eminence in our thoughts, desires, and supplications. This petition must take the precedence, for the glory of God’s great name is the ultimate end of all things. Every other request must not only be subordinated to this one, but be in harmony with and in pursuance of it. We cannot pray aright unless the honour of God be dominant in our hearts. If we cherish a desire for the honouring of God’s name we must not ask for anything which would be against the divine holiness to bestow.

By “thy name” (Mat 6:9) is meant God Himself, as in Psalm 20:1, etc. But more particularly His “name” signifies God as He is revealed. It has pleased the Maker of heaven and earth to make Himself known to us, not only in His works, but in the Scriptures, and supremely so in Christ. In the written and in the personal Word, God has displayed Himself to us, manifesting His glorious perfections—His matchless attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, His moral character of holiness, righteousness, goodness and mercy. He is also revealed through His blessed titles—the Rock of Israel, Him that cannot lie, the Father of mercies, the God of all grace. And when we pray that the name of God may be hallowed, we make request that the glory thereof may be displayed by Him, and that we may be enabled to esteem and magnify Him agreeably thereto.

In praying that God’s name be hallowed, we ask that He will so act that His creatures may be moved to render that adoration which is due Him. His name has indeed been eminently glorified in all ages, in the various workings of His providence and grace, whereby His power, wisdom, righteousness, and mercy have been demonstrated before the eyes of angels and of men. We therefore request that He would continue to glorify these perfections. In the past, God has, in the magnifying of His name, employed methods and measures which were strange and staggering to finite intelligence, often allowing His enemies to prosper for a time and His people to be sorely persecuted—nevertheless, they glorified “the LORD in the fires” (Isa 24:15). And so now, and in the future, when we ask for God to be glorified in the prosperity of His church, the dissemination of the Gospel, and the extension of His kingdom, we must subordinate our request to the divine sovereignty and leave it with Him as to where and when and how these things shall be brought to pass.

“Hallowed be thy name” (Mat 6:9). How easy it is to utter these words without the slightest thought of their profound and holy import! If we offer this petition from the heart, we desire that God’s name may be sanctified by us, and at the same time own the indisposition and utter inability to do this of ourselves. Such a request denotes a longing to be empowered to glorify God in everything whereby He makes Himself known, that we may honour Him in all situations and circumstances. Whatever be my lot, however low I may sink, through whatever deep waters I may be called to pass, get to Yourself glory in me and by me. Blessedly was this exemplified by our perfect Saviour. “Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (Joh 12:27-28). Though He must be immersed in the baptism of suffering, yet “Hallowed be thy name” (Mat 6:9).

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10). The first petition has respect to God’s honour, the second and third indicate the means whereby His glory is manifested and maintained on earth. God’s name is manifestatively glorified here just in proportion as His “kingdom” comes to us and His “will” is done by us. This is why we are exhorted to “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat 6:33). In praying, “Thy kingdom come” (Mat 6:9), we acknowledge that by nature we are under the dominion of sin and Satan, and beg that we may be the more fully delivered therefrom and that the rule of God may be more completely established in our hearts. We long to see the kingdom of grace extended and the kingdom of glory ushered in. Accordingly we make request that God’s will may be more fully made known to us, wrought in us and performed by us, “in earth as it is in heaven” (Mat 6:10)—that is, humbly, cheerfully, impartially, promptly, constantly.

“Give us this day our daily bread” (Mat 6:11). This is the first of the four petitions more immediately relating to the supply of our own needs, in which we can clearly discern an implied reference to each of the persons in the blessed Trinity. Our temporal wants are supplied by the kindness of the Father; our sins are forgiven through the mediation of the Son; we are preserved

from temptation and delivered from evil by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. By asking for our “daily bread,” a tacit acknowledgment is made that, “In Adam and by our own sins we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them. And that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them, but prone to desire, get and use them unlawfully. We pray for ourselves and others that they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day, in the use of lawful means, may of His free gift and as His Fatherly wisdom shall deem best, enjoy a competent portion of them, and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them and contentment in them” (Larger Catechism).

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mat 6:11). As it is contrary to the holiness of God, sin is a defilement, a dishonour, and reproach to us. As it is a violation of His law, it is a crime. As to the guilt which we contract thereby, it is a debt. As creatures we owed a debt of obedience unto our Maker and Governor, and through failure to render the same and on account of our rank disobedience, we have incurred a debt of punishment, and it is for this latter that we implore the divine pardon. In order to the obtaining of God’s forgiveness, we are required to address ourselves unto Him in faith and prayer. The designed connection between this and the preceding petition should not be missed, “Give us...and forgive us”—the former cannot profit us without the latter—what true comfort can we derive from external mercies when our conscience remains burdened on account of a sense of guilt! But since Christ here teaches us that He is a giving God, what encouragement to look unto Him as a forgiving God.

“And lead us not into temptation” (Mat 6:13). The “us” includes all fellow-Christians on earth, for one of the first things which grace teaches us is unselfishness—to be as much concerned about the good of my brethren as I am about my own—not only for their temporal welfare, but especially for their spiritual. In the preceding petition, we have prayed that the guilt of past sins may be remitted, here we beg to be saved from incurring new guilt through being overcome by fresh sin. This request makes acknowledgment of the universal providence of God, that all creatures are at the sovereign disposal of their Maker, that He has the same absolute control over evil as over good, and therefore has the ordering of all temptations. It is from the evil of temptations we ask to be spared. If God sees fit that we should be tempted objectively (through providences which though good in themselves, offer occasion to sin within us) that we may not yield thereto, or if we yield, that we may not be absolutely overcome.

“But deliver us from evil” (Mat 6:9). All temptations (trials and troubles) are not evil either in their nature, design, or outcome. The Saviour Himself was tempted of the devil and was definitely led into the wilderness by the Spirit for that very end. It is therefore from the evil of temptations we are to ask for deliverance, as this final petition indicates. We are to pray not for a total exemption from them, but only for a removal of the judgment of them. This is clear from our Lord’s own example in prayer, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (Joh 17:15). To be kept from the evil of sin is a far greater mercy than deliverance from the trouble of temptation. But how far has God undertaken to deliver us from evil? First, as it would be hurtful to our highest interests. It was for Peter’s ultimate good that he was suffered to temporarily fall. Second, from its having full dominion over us, so that we shall not totally and finally apostatize. Third, by an ultimate deliverance when He removes us to heaven.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Mat 6:9). Thus the Family Prayer closes with a doxology or an ascription of that glory which is due unto God,

thereby teaching us that prayer and praise should always go together. It is to be carefully noted that this doxology of the divine perfections is made use of as a plea to enforce the preceding petitions, “Deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom,” etc.—teaching us to back up our requests with Scriptural reasons or arguments. From the divine perfections the suppliant is to take encouragement to expect a gracious answer. There is nothing in or from ourselves which is meritorious, and therefore hope must be grounded upon the character of Him to whom we pray. His perfections are not evanescent, but “for ever.” The concluding “Amen” expresses both a fervent desire, “So be it,” and an avowal of faith, “It shall be so.”

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### 8. *At Zarephath*

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Ki 17:8-9). Notice carefully the connection between these two verses. The spiritual significance of this may be the more apparent to the reader if we state it thus—our actions must be regulated by the Word of God if our souls are to be nourished and strengthened. That was one of the outstanding lessons taught Israel in the wilderness. Their food and refreshment could only be obtained so long as they traveled in the path of obedience (Num 9:18-23—observe well the seven-fold “at the commandment of the LORD” in that passage). God’s people of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own. The Lord arranged everything for them—when they should journey and when they should encamp. Had they refused to follow the cloud, there had been no manna for them.

Thus it was with Elijah, for God has given the same rule unto His ministers as they unto whom they minister. They must practice what they preach or woe be unto them. The prophet was not allowed to have any will of his own, and to say how long he should remain at Cherith or where he should go from there. The Word of JEHOVAH settled everything for him, and by obeying the same he obtained sustenance. What searching and important truth is there here for every Christian. The path of obedience is the only one of blessing and enrichment. Ah, may we not discover at this very point the cause of our leanness and the explanation of our unfruitfulness? Is it not because we have been so self-willed that our soul is starved and our faith weak? Is it not because there has been so little denying of self, taking up the cross and following Christ, that we are so sickly and joyless?

Nothing so ministers to the health and joy of our souls as being in subjection to the will of Him with whom we have to do. And the preacher must heed this principle, as well as the ordinary Christian. The preacher must himself tread the path of obedience if he would be used by the Holy One. How could Elijah have afterwards said with so much assurance on mount Carmel, “If the LORD be God, follow him” (1Ki 18:21), if he had previously followed a course of self-pleasing and insubordination? As we pointed out last month, the correlative of “service” is obedience. The two things are permanently joined together. As soon as I cease to obey my Master, I am no longer His “servant.” In this connection, let us not forget that one of the noblest titles of our King was “The servant of JEHOVAH.” None of us can seek to realize a grander aim than that which was the inspiration of His heart, “I come to do thy will, O God” (see Heb 10:9).

But let it be frankly pointed out that the path of obedience to God is far from being an easy one. It calls for the daily denying of self, and therefore it can only be traversed as the eye is fixed steadily on the Lord and the conscience is in subjection to His Word. It is true that in keeping His commandments there is “great reward” (Psa 19:11), for the Lord will be no man’s debtor. Nevertheless it calls for the setting aside of carnal reason, and that is no easy matter to flesh and blood. Witness the path of Elijah—called to take his place by Cherith and there be fed by ravens—how could a proud intellect understand that? And now bidden to journey to a far distant and heathen city, there to be sustained by a desolate widow, that was herself on the point of starvation. Ah, my reader, the path of faith is utterly opposed to what we call “common sense,” and if you suffer from the same spiritual disease as does this writer, then you often find it harder to crucify reason than you do to repudiate the filthy rags of self-righteousness.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks” (1Ki 17:10). So poor that she was without any fuel, or any servant to go and obtain a few sticks for her. What encouragement could Elijah derive from appearances? None whatever. Instead there was everything which was calculated to fill him with doubts and fears if he were occupied with outward circumstances. “And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1Ki 17:10-12)—that was what confronted the prophet when he arrived at his divinely appointed destination! Put yourself in his place, dear reader, and would you not have felt that such a prospect was a gloomy and disquieting one?

But Elijah “conferred not with flesh and blood” (see Gal 1:16), and therefore he was not discouraged by what looked so unpromising a situation. Instead, his heart was sustained by the immutable Word of Him that cannot lie. Elijah’s confidence rested not in favourable circumstances or “a goodly outlook,” but in the faithfulness of the living God, and therefore his faith needed no assistance from the things around him. Appearances might be dark and dismal, but the eye of faith could pierce the black clouds and see above them the smiling countenance of his Provider. Elijah’s God was the Almighty, with whom all things are possible. “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Ki 17:9)—that was what his heart was resting on. What is yours resting on? Are you being kept in peace in this ever-changing scene? Have you made one of His sure promises your own? “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed” (Psa 37:3). “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed” (Psa 46:1-2).

But let us return to the outward circumstances which confronted Elijah upon his approach to Zarephath. “When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks” (1Ki 17:10). God had told His servant to go there and had promised a widow should sustain him, but what her name was, where she lived, and how he was to distinguish her from others, he was not informed. He trusted God to give him further light when he arrived there—nor was he disappointed. He was speedily relieved of any suspense as to the identity of the person who was to befriend him. Apparently this meeting was quite casual, for there was no appointment between them. “Behold”—ponder and admire—“the widow woman was there.” See how the Lord in His providence overrules all events, so that this particular woman should be at the gate at the very time the prophet arrived!

Behold! here she comes forth as if on purpose to meet him. Yet he did not know her, nor she know him. It has all the appearance of being accidental, and yet it was decreed and arranged by God so as to make good His word to the prophet. Ah, my reader, there is no event in this world, however great or however small, which happens by chance. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). How blessed to be assured that, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psa 37:23). It is sheer unbelief which disconnects the ordinary things of life from God. All our circumstances and experiences are directed by the Lord, for, “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). Cultivate the holy habit of seeing the hand of God in everything that happens to us.

“When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there” (1Ki 17:10). How this illustrates once more a principle to which we have frequently called the attention of the reader, namely, that when God works He always works at both ends of the line. If Jacob sends his sons down into Egypt seeking food in time of famine, Joseph is moved to give it unto them. If Israel’s spies enter Jericho, there is a Rahab raised up to shelter them. If Mordecai is begging the Lord to come to the deliverance of His threatened people, king Ahasuerus is rendered sleepless, made to search the state records and befriend Mordecai and his fellows. If the Ethiopian eunuch is desirous of an understanding of God’s Word, Philip is sent to expound it to him. If Cornelius is praying for an opening up of the Gospel, Peter is charged to preach it to him. Elijah had received no intimation as to where this widow resided, but divine providence timed her steps so that she encountered him at the entrance to the city. What encouragements to faith are these!

Here, then, was the widow—but how was Elijah to know she was the one whom God had ordained should befriend him? Well he must try her, as the servant of Abraham did Rebekah when he was sent to fetch a wife for Isaac. Eliezer prayed that the damsel to whom he should say, “Let down thy pitcher” would answer, “Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also” (Gen 24:14). Rebekah came forth and fulfilled these conditions. So here. Elijah tests this woman to see if she is kind and benevolent, “Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink” (1Ki 17:10). Just as Eliezer considered only one possessed of kindness would be a fit companion for his master’s son, so Elijah was convinced that only a liberal-minded person would be likely to sustain him in a time of famine and drought.

“He called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink” (1Ki 17:10). Observe the gracious and respectful demeanour of Elijah. The fact that he was a prophet of JEHOVAH did not warrant him to treat this poor widow in a haughty and overbearing manner. Instead of commanding, he said, “I pray thee.” What a rebuke does that contain for those who are proud and officious. Civility is due to everyone, “Be courteous” (1Pe 3:8) is one of the divine precepts given to believers. And what a severe test it was to which Elijah submitted this poor woman—to fetch him a drink of water! Yet she made no demur nor did she demand a high price for what had become a costly luxury. No, not even though Elijah was a complete stranger to her, belonging to another race. Admire here the moving power of God, who can draw out the human heart to acts of kindness unto His servants.

“And as she was going to fetch it” (1Ki 17:11). Yes, she left off gathering sticks for herself and at the first request of this stranger started for the drink of water. Let us learn to imitate her in this respect and be always ready to perform an act of kindness toward our fellow creatures. If we do not have the wherewithal to give to the distressed, we should be the more ready to work for them (see Eph 4:28). A cup of cold water, though it cost us nothing more than the trouble of fetching it, shall in no-wise lose its reward. “And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and

said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand” (1Ki 17:11). This the prophet requested in order to test her still further—and what a test—to share her very last meal with him—and also to pave the way for a further discourse with her.

“Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand” (1Ki 17:11). What a selfish request this seemed! How likely would human nature resent such a demand to draw upon her slender resources. Yet in reality it was God that was meeting with her in the hour of her deepest need. “Therefore will the LORD wait that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted that he may have mercy upon you, for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa 30:18). But this widow must first be proved, as later another Gentile woman was proved by the Lord incarnate (Mat 15:22-28). God would indeed supply all her need, but would she trust Him? So often He allows things to get worse before there is any improvement. He “waits to be gracious.” Why? To bring us to the end of ourselves and of our resources, till all seems lost and we are in despair—that we may more clearly discern His delivering hand.

“And she said, as the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1Ki 17:12). The effects of the terrible famine and drought in Palestine were also felt in the adjacent countries. In connection with “oil” being found in this widow’s possession at Zarephath in Zidon, J. J. Blunt, in his admirable work, “Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament,” has a helpful chapter. He points out that on the division of Canaan the district of Zidon fell to the lot of Asher (Jos 19:28-31). Then he turns the reader back to Deuteronomy 33, reminding him that when Moses blessed the twelve tribes he said, “Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil” (Deu 33:24)—indicating the fertility of that district and the character of its principal product. Thus, after a long spell of famine, oil was most likely to be found there. Hence by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see their perfect harmony.

“Behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1Ki 17:9). Poor soul. Reduced to the last extremity, with nothing but a most painful death staring her in the face! Hers was the language of carnal reason and not of faith, of unbelief and not of confidence in the living God. Yes, and quite natural under the circumstances. As yet she knew nothing of that word to Elijah, “Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1Ki 17:9). No, she thought the end had come. Ah, my reader, how much better is God than our fears. The unbelieving Hebrews imagined they would starve in the wilderness, but they did not. David once said in his heart, “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” (1Sa 27:1), but he did not. The apostles thought they would drown in the stormy sea, but they did not.

“Were half the breath in sorrow spent  
To heaven in supplication sent,  
Our cheerful song would oftener be  
‘Hear what the Lord hath done for me.’”

“And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1Ki 17:12). To natural sight, to human reason, it seemed impossible that she could sustain anyone. In abject poverty, the end of her provisions was now in sight. And her eyes were not on God (any more than ours are till the Spirit works

within us!) but upon the barrel, and it was now failing her. Consequently there was nothing before her mind except death. Unbelief and death are inseparably joined together. This widow's confidence lay in the barrel and the cruse, and beyond them she saw no hope. As yet her soul knew nothing of the blessedness of communion with Him to whom alone belong the issues from death (Psa 68:20). She was not yet able to "against hope believe in hope" (Rom 4:18). Alas, what a poor tottering thing is that hope which rests on nothing better than a barrel of meal.

How prone we all are to lean on something just as paltry as a barrel of meal, and just so long as we do, our expectations can only be scanty and evanescent. Yet, on the other hand, let us remember that the smallest measure of meal in the hand of God is to faith as sufficient and effectual as "the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psa 50:10). But alas, how rarely is faith in healthy exercise. Only too often we are like the disciples when, in the presence of the hungry multitude they exclaimed, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" (Joh 6:9)—that is the language of unbelief, of carnal reason. Faith is not occupied with difficulties, but with Him with whom all things are possible. Faith is not occupied with circumstances, but with the God of circumstances. Thus it was with Elijah, as we shall see (D.V.) when we contemplate the immediate sequel.

And what a test of Elijah's faith was now supplied by those doleful words of the poor widow. Consider the situation which now confronted his eyes. A widow and her son starving, a few sticks, a handful of meal, and a little oil between them and death. Nevertheless God had said to him, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (1Ki 17:9). How many would exclaim, How deeply mysterious, what a trying experience for the prophet!—why, he needed to help her rather than become a burden upon her. Ah, but like Abram before him, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith" (Rom 4:20). He knew that the Possessor of heaven and earth had decreed she should sustain him, and even though there had been no meal or oil at all, that had in nowise dampened his spirits or deterred him. O my reader, if you know anything experimentally of the goodness, the power and faithfulness of God, let your confidence in Him remain unshaken, no matter what appearances may be.

"He who hath helped thee hitherto,  
Will help thee all thy journey through;  
And give thee daily cause to raise  
New Ebenezers to His praise."

"Behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die" (1Ki 17:9). Let it be duly noted that this woman did not fail to discharge her responsibility. Up to the very end she was industrious, making use of the means to hand. Instead of giving way to utter despair, sitting down and wringing her hands, she was busily occupied, gathering sticks for what she fully believed would be her last meal. This is not an unimportant detail, but one which we need to take to heart. Idleness is never justified, least of all in an emergency. Nay, the more desperate the situation the greater the need for us to bestir ourselves. To give way to dejection never accomplishes any good. Discharge your responsibility to the very end, even though it be in preparing for your final meal. Richly was the widow repaid for her industry. It was while she was in the path of duty (household duty!), that God, through His servant, met with and blessed her!

# THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY

## 3. *Its Nature*

We now come to our fourth point. The spiritual inability of the natural man is a criminal one. This follows inevitably from the fact that his impotency is a moral and voluntary one. Highly important it is that we should be brought to see, feel, and own that our spiritual helplessness is a culpable one, for until we do so we shall never truly justify God nor condemn ourselves. To realize one's self to be equally "without strength" and "without excuse" is deeply humiliating, and fallen man will strive with all his might to stifle such a conviction and deny the truth of it. Yet until we place the blame of our sinfulness where it really belongs, we shall not, we cannot, either vindicate the righteousness of the divine law or appreciate the marvelous grace made known in the Gospel. To condemn ourselves as God condemns us is the one prerequisite to establish our title to salvation in Christ.

"We cannot ascribe too much to the grace of God, but we should be careful that, under a semblance of exalting His grace, we do not furnish the slothful and unfaithful with excuses for their willfulness and wickedness. God is gracious, but let men be justly responsible for his own evil and not presume to state his case so as would, by just consequence, represent the holy God as being the cause of the sin which He hates and forbids," wrote that prince in Israel, John Newton (1725-1807). That was indeed a timely word. Alas that some who claim to be great admirers of his works have sadly failed to uphold the responsibility of the sinner, and have so expressed his spiritual inability as to furnish him with much excuse for his sloth and infidelity. Only by insisting on the criminality of fallen man's impotency can such a deplorable snare be avoided.

Inexorably as man's criminality attaches to his free agency in the committing of sin, yet as said above, the sinner will strive with might and main to avoid such a conclusion and seek to throw the blame upon someone else other than himself. He will haughtily ask, Would any right minded person blame a man whose arms had been broken because he could no longer perform manual labour? or condemn a blind man because he did not read? then why should I be held guilty for not performing spiritual duties which are altogether beyond my powers? To this difficulty several replies may be made. (1) There is no analogy in the cases you have advanced. Broken arms and sightless eyes are incompetent members, but the intellectual and moral faculties have not been destroyed, and it is because of your misuse of the same that you are justly held culpable.

(2) Not only do you fail to use your moral faculties in the performing of spiritual good, but you employ them in the doing of moral evil, and the excuse that you cannot help yourself is an idle one. Apply that principle to the commercial transactions of society and what would be the result? A man contracts a debt within the compass of his present financial ability to meet. He then perversely and wickedly squanders his money, and gambles away his property so that he is no longer able to pay what he owes—is he therefore not bound to pay? Has his reckless prodigality freed him from all moral obligation to discharge his debts? Must justice now break her scales and no more hold an equal balance because he chooses to be a villain? No indeed, unregenerate men would not allow such reasoning.

To this it may be objected, I did not bring this depravity upon myself, but was born with it. If my heart be altogether evil and I did not make it so, if such a heart was given me without my choice and consent, then how can I be to blame for its inevitable issues and actions? Such a question betrays the fact that a wicked heart is regarded as a calamity which man did not choose,

but which must be endured. It is contemplated as a thing not at all faulty in its own nature, so that if there be any blame attached to it, it must be for something previous to it and of quite another kind. As a man born diseased is not personally to blame, but if it be the result of his own follies it is a just retribution. But to reason so about sin is utterly erroneous, as if it were no sin merely to be a sinner or to commit sin when one has an inclination so to do, but that only the bringing of a sinful disposition upon ourselves would be a wicked thing.

Stripped of all disguise and ambiguity, the above objection amounts to this—Adam was in reality the only sinner, and we his miserable offspring being by nature depraved, are under a necessity of sinning, and therefore cannot be to blame for it. The fact that sin itself is sinful is lost sight of. Scripture traces all our evil acts back to a sinful heart and teaches that this is a blamable thing in itself. A depraved heart is a moral thing, being something quite different from a weak head, a bad memory, or an infirm constitution. A man is not to blame for these physical infirmities, providing he has not brought them upon himself. To say that I cannot help hating God and opposing my neighbour, and that therefore I am not to blame for the same, certainly makes me out to be a most vile and insensible wretch.

It is not necessary in order to a fallen creature's being to blame for his evil dispositions, that he should first be virtuous or free from moral corruption. If a person now finds himself a sinner, and that from the heart he approves and chooses rebellion against God and His law, he is not the less a sinner because he has been of the same disposition for many years and has always sinned from his birth. His having sinned from the beginning, and done nothing else cannot be a legitimate excuse for sinning now. Nor is man's guilt the less because sin is so deeply and so thoroughly fixed in his heart. The stronger the enmity against God, the greater its heinousness. Disinclination Godwards is the very essence of depravity. When we rightly define the nature of man's inability unto good—namely, a moral and a voluntary one—not the absence of faculties, but the misuse of them—then this excuse of blamelessness is at once exposed.

But the carnal mind will still object, "We are naturally as God has made us. And if therefore we are born sinful and God has created us thus, then He and not ourselves is the Author of sin." To such awful lengths is the enmity of the carnal mind capable of going—shifting the onus from his own guilty shoulders and throwing the blame upon the thrice holy God! But this objection was obviated in an earlier article. God made man upright, but he apostatized. Man ruined himself. God endowed each of us with rationality, with a conscience, with a will to refuse the evil and choose the good. And it is by the free exercise of our faculties that we sin, and we have no more justification for transferring the guilt from ourselves to someone else than Adam had to blame Eve or Eve the serpent.

It is replied, But it is not consistent with the divine perfections to bring mankind into the world under such handicapped and wretched circumstances. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom 9:20). It is blasphemous to say that it is not consistent with the divine perfections for God to do what in fact He does. It is a matter of fact that we are born into the world destitute of the moral image of God, ignorant of Him, insensible of His infinite glory. It is a plain matter of fact that in consequence of this deprivation we are disposed to love ourselves supremely, live to ourselves ultimately, and wholly delight in what is not of God. And it is plain to demonstration that this tendency is in direct contrariety to God's holy law and is exceedingly sinful. Whether or not we can see the justice and wisdom of this divine providence, yet we must remember that God is "holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works."

It may still be objected, How can I possibly be to blame for my evil disposition when it was Adam who corrupted human nature? Answer—You are an enemy to the infinitely glorious God, and that voluntarily, and therefore you are infinitely to blame and without excuse, for nothing can make it right for a creature to be deliberately hostile to his Creator or possibly extenuate such a crime. It is in its own nature infinitely wrong and therefore you stand guilty before God. The very fact that in the day of judgment “every mouth will be stopped” (see Rom 3:19) shows there is no validity or force to this objection. It is for the acting out of his nature—instead of the mortifying thereof—for which the sinner is held accountable. The fact that we are born traitors to God cannot cancel our obligation to render Him allegiance. No man can escape from the righteous requirements of law by a voluntary opposition to it.

That man’s sinful nature is the direct consequence of Adam’s transgression does not to the slightest degree make it any less his own sin or render him any less blameworthy. This is clear not only from the justice of the principle of representation (Adam’s acting as our federal head), but also from the fact that each of us approves of Adam’s transgression by emulating his example, joining ourselves with him in rebellion against God. That we go on to break the covenant of works and disobey the divine law demonstrates that we are righteously condemned with Adam. Because each descendant of Adam voluntarily prolongs and perpetuates in himself the evil inclination originated by his first parents, renders us doubly guilty. If not, why do we not repudiate Adam and refuse to sin—stand out in opposition to him and be holy! If we resent our being corrupted through Adam, why not break the entail of sin?

But let us now turn from these objections to the positive side of our subject. The Scriptures uniformly teach that fallen man’s moral and voluntary inability is a criminal one, that God justly holds him guilty both for his depraved state, and all his sinful actions. So plain is this, so abundantly evidenced, there is little need for us to labour the point. The first three chapters of Romans are expressly devoted to this solemn theme. There it is declared, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). The reason for this is given in verses 19-20, ending with the inexorable sentence, “So that they are without excuse.” The second chapter opens with, “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man,” and in Romans 3:19, the apostle shows the ruling of the divine law is such that, in the day to come, “Every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

The criminality of the sinner’s depravity and moral impotency is clearly brought out in Matthew 25:14-30. The general design of that parable is easily perceived. By the “Lord” of the servants is signified the Creator as the Owner and Governor of this world. By the “servants” mankind in general is represented. By the different “talents” is meant the faculties and powers with which God has endowed us, the privileges and advantages by which He distinguishes one person from another. By the two servants who faithfully improved their talents is meant the righteous who serve God with fidelity. By the slothful and unfaithful servant, the sinner, who entirely neglects the service of God and blames Him rather than himself for his negligence. His complaint in verses 24 and 25 expresses the feelings of every impenitent sinner, complaining that God requires from him (holiness) and what He has not given to him (a holy heart). God’s condemnation is on the ground that he improves not what he did have (Mat 25:27)—his rational faculties and moral powers. “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness” (Mat 25:30) shows the justice of his condemnation.

The excuse that I cannot help being so perverse is further ruled out of court by Christ’s declarations to the scribes and Pharisees. They had no heart either for Christ or His doctrine. He

told them plainly, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word” (Joh 8:43). But their inability was no excuse for them in His account, for He affirmed that all their impotency arose from their evil hearts, their lack of a holy disposition, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will [desire to] do” (Joh 8:44). Yet though they had no more power to help themselves than we have, and were no more able to transform their hearts than we are, nevertheless our Lord judged them to be wholly to blame and altogether inexcusable, saying to them, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak [excuse] for their sin” (Joh 15:22).

Let it be specifically pointed out that when Scripture affirms the inability of a man unto good, it never does so by way of extenuation. Thus, when JEHOVAH asked Israel of old, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23) It was not for the purpose of mitigating their guilt, but with the object of showing how it aggravated their obstinacy of heart and to evince that no external means could be effectual unto their recovery. Just as likely was an Ethiopian to be moved by exhortation or expostulation to seek and change the colour of his skin, as any appeals would induce rebels against God to renounce those iniquities to which they had so long been addicted.

“Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God” (Joh 8:45 47). Those cutting interrogations of our Lord proceeded on the supposition that they could have received the teaching of Christ if it had been agreeable to their corrupt nature, and its being otherwise was the only reason why they could not understand or receive it. In like manner, when He affirmed, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44), Christ did not intimate that any natural man honestly desired to come unto Him, and was deterred from so doing against his will—He meant that man is incapable of freely doing that which is inconsistent with his corruptions. They were averse to come unto the holy Redeemer because they were in love with sin.

The excuse that I cannot help doing wrong is worthless. To plead my inability unto good simply because I lack the heart so to do would be laughed out of court even among men. Does anyone suppose that only the want of a will to earn his living excuses a man from doing so, just as bodily infirmity does? Does anyone imagine that the covetous miser, who with all his useless hoards, has no heart to give a penny to the poor, is for that reason excused from deeds of charity as one who has nothing to give? Nor does a man’s heart being fully set in him to evil render his wicked actions the less evil. If they did, then it would necessarily follow that the worse any sinner grows the less to blame is he—and nothing could be more absurd.

Let us show yet further the utter worthlessness of those evasions by which the sinner seeks to deny the criminality of his moral impotency. Men never resort to such silly reasonings when they are wronged by others. When treated with disrespect and ill-nature by their fellows, they never offer the excuses for them behind which they seek to cloak their own sins. If someone deliberately robbed me, would I say, Poor fellow, he could not help himself, Adam is to blame! If someone wickedly slandered me, would I say, Such a person is to be pitied, for he was born into the world with this evil disposition. If someone whom I had always treated honourably and generously returned my kindness by doing all he could to injure me, and then replied, I could not help hating you—so far from accepting that as a valid extenuation, I would rightly consider his vile enmity only rendered him the more to blame.

Finally, let it be pointed out that when a sinner is truly awakened, humbled, and broken down before God, he realizes that he deserves to be damned for his vile rebellion against God, and

freely acknowledges that he is what he is voluntarily and not by compulsion. He now realizes that he has had no love for God, nor any desire to love Him—that he was an enemy to Him in his very heart, and voluntarily so. By His grace he comes to realize that all his fair pretenses and promises, prayers, and religious performances, were mere hypocrisy, arising only from self-love, guilty fears, and mercenary hopes. He feels himself to be without excuse and owns that eternal judgment is his just due. When truly convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit the sinner is driven out of all his false refuges, and admits that his inability is a criminal one, that he is guilty.

## ACCESS TO GOD

The matter of our approach into the presence of God is one of vital importance, yet it is one (like so many others these days) upon which much confusion and misconception exists. We will not now attempt to canvass the principal errors pertaining thereto, for there would be little profit for either writer or reader in prosecuting such a task. Rather do we wish to call attention unto the various aspects of the subject, for it is failure to perceive these and hold their due balance which has resulted in the fostering of false impressions in quarters which some regard as being the most orthodox sections of Christendom. If one essential aspect of this subject be ignored, or if another one be emphasized to the virtual exclusion of everything else, then the most misleading and dangerous ideas must result therefrom.

Let us begin by asking the question, Is it possible for a depraved and defiled creature to obtain access unto the thrice Holy One? If there is one thing taught more plainly in the Scriptures than another it is that sin separates the sinner and God. This fearful fact is impressively set forth in Genesis 3:24, that flaming sword was the symbol of a sin-hating God, barring approach unto the emblem of His presence. When JEHOVAH appeared on Sinai, amid the most solemn manifestations of His awful presence, even the favoured Hebrews were commanded under pain of death to keep their distance from Him. An Israelite who became ceremonially unclean was rigidly excluded from the camp. Even when the tabernacle and the temple were erected, the common people were not allowed to enter the holy places. In how many different ways did God make it evident that sin obstructed any access to Himself!

But not only does God debar the sinner from access, the sinner himself has no desire to approach unto Him—rather does he wish to flee as far as possible from His presence. A sense of sin and the guilt of it upon the conscience drives the sinner from the Lord. This fact was also solemnly exemplified at the dawn of human history—just as long as our first parents remained in dutiful subjection to their Maker, walking in obedience to His commandments, they enjoyed blissful communion with Him, but as soon as they became self-willed and rebellious, all was radically altered. After they had eaten of the forbidden fruit and they heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden, they fled in terror, seeking to hide from Him. And thus it has been ever since.

Is there, then, no access to God for the fallen creature? If there were not we should not be engaged in writing this article. Access to God is possible—possible for the chief of sinners—but only via the appointed Mediator. As the Lord Jesus so emphatically declared, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). It is through the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him alone—not through priest or pope, Mary or the angels, good works or tears—that we may obtain access to God. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access” (Rom 5:1-2). In pointing this out we are covering ground which is thoroughly familiar to all our

readers, truth which is still proclaimed in many places. Yet it is by no means the whole of the truth on this subject, though it is all that is presented thereon in certain quarters. It is those neglected aspects which we now desire to particularly stress.

Once again we would point out that unless we differentiate between things that differ there is bound to be confusion and error. So here. We must distinguish between the way of access which Christ has opened for sinners into the presence of God, the qualifications which are required from those entering that way, and the exercise of those qualifications so that the way is actually used. But the moment we mention “qualification” and the necessity for “exercising” the same, some will demur, insisting that we are thereby sounding a legalistic note and destroying the simplicity of the Gospel. Then let us ask such objectors, Are hypocrites entitled to use that way of access which Christ has opened? Do “Christians” who exercise no faith, but simply offer cold and mechanical prayers, enter into God’s presence? If the objector answers No—as honesty compels him to do—then he has granted our contention, whether or not he agrees with us in detail.

How many professing Christians do really obtain personal access to and enjoy conscious communion with the Holy One? What percentage of real Christians are actually accustomed to do so? Alas, what multitudes have been deceived by Satan into supposing that all they have to do is get down on their knees, plead the name of Christ, and automatically they obtain audience with the Most High. Not so. It still holds good that, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:1-2). The principles of the divine government know no alteration, and allowed and unconfessed sins act as an impassable barrier between the soul and God as truly today as they did under the Old Testament economy. No change of dispensation modifies the requirements of God’s holiness or reduces the enormity of sin.

Three things are absolutely necessary if any is to have access to God. First, he must have the legal right or title to do so. Second, he must possess the necessary moral fitness. Third, he must be spiritually and experimentally empowered. Our legal right to approach unto God is found alone in the merits of Christ—His sacrificial work and the present exercise of His Priesthood give me title to draw near unto the throne of grace. But does that cover the whole matter? Is nothing more than a legal title required? Ah, the real saint knows otherwise from painful experience. How often has he entered his closet, sought audience with the divine Majesty, pleaded the blood of Christ, yet without any conscious access. So far from any conscious approach to Him, God seems far off, and all is darkness and deadness in the soul. Like the spouse in the Canticles, he seeks his Beloved, but finds Him not.

“Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him” (Job 23:8-9). Has that painful experience of Job’s never been duplicated in your own? Was his case altogether exceptional? Far from it, as the recorded lamentations of others of God’s children clearly show. “Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” (Psa 10:1). Yes, even the sweet psalmist of Israel knew what it was to feel God’s distance from him and to be denied conscious access to Him. “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?” (Psa 13:1). Again and again this was his agonizing experience. And there are seasons in the history of all believers when such language is just as suitable to express their experience as Psalm 46 or Psalm 150 is suited to their cases on other occasions.

“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). The words we have placed in italics present another vital aspect of our subject, showing as they do the Christian’s dependence upon the agency of the Holy Spirit. Herein each person of the blessed Trinity is accorded His own distinctive place in the economy of redemption—access is unto the Father, it is through Christ, but it is by the Spirit. The sinful believer can no more approach unto the Father without the gracious operations of the Spirit than he could without the mediation of the Lord Jesus. One has procured for us the legal right, the Other supplies the experimental enablement. The exercise of faith, as we shall yet see, is another essential prerequisite for drawing near to God, but the actings of faith lie not within our own unaided power—He who first imparted this heavenly gift must quicken and energize it if it is to function properly.

“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). What place is given to this part of the truth in most sections of Christendom today? None at all. And even where the third person of the Godhead is duly owned and honoured, how feebly do the saints apprehend their imperative need of the Spirit’s daily working within them. His operations are essential if our leaden hearts are to be raised above the things of time and sense, if our affections are to flow forth unto their rightful Object, if faith is to be duly acted upon Him, if a sense of His presence is to be communicated unto the soul. But will the Spirit perform these gracious operations if we are indifferent as to whether or not our conduct grieves Him? If a Christian has spent his evening at the card-table or the theatre, and before retiring to rest bows his knees, will the Holy Spirit, at that time, draw out the heart of such a one and grant him conscious access to the Father?

What has just been raised brings us to still another aspect of our subject—there must be a moral fitness if the suppliant is to obtain access to God. Alas, that so little is heard about this in the ministry of the day. Yet the reason for this omission is not far to seek—where the dominant object is the pleasing of the hearer, little will be said in condemnation of a carnal walk, and still less of the serious consequences thereof. But though the pulpit has become so unfaithful, God abides faithful, and He will not wink at evil doing. No, not in His own children, nor will He allow the sacred name of Christ to be used as a passport into His presence by the workers of iniquity. Is it not written, “With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the obstinate thou wilt show thyself obstinate” (see Psa 18:26)—that means what it says, and says what it means.

Loose walking severs communion with God, and then will He act distantly toward us. An earthly parent (who is prudent) will not conduct himself with the same familiarity and cordiality toward a disobedient child as he will unto a dutiful one. Our folly must be repented of and humbly acknowledged before fellowship can be restored with God. Yea, even if our fault be only against a fellow-creature it must be righted before God will accept our worship, “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Mat 5:23-24)—how many are unable to obtain conscious access to God through failure at this very point! “Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you” (Zec 1:3). If we would have God turn unto us in mercy we must turn unto Him in obedience.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace” (Rom 5:1-2). This brings before us still another aspect of our subject—the necessity for the exercise of faith in order to approach God. The same truth is presented again in, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him” (Eph 3:12). Faith is the appointed means of access, for it is the hand which receives every blessing from God. Faith in God’s willingness to grant us an audience, faith in the

sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice to provide us with the title of approach. Faith in the divine promises that if we contritely confess our sins He will cleanse us therefrom. At first a small degree of faith enables the Christian to approach unto God, but as he advances in the knowledge of his own heart and of God's hatred of sin, stronger faith needs to be exercised if we are to draw near the heavenly throne with confidence. Yet we must be very careful not to mistake blatant presumption for holy assurance.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:19-22). This is what may be termed the classic passage on our present theme, gathering up as it does into one comprehensive statement the essential features thereof. But what a solemn example it affords of the lack of proportion which now so generally prevails. We are probably safe in saying that for every once verse 22 is quoted, verse 19 is cited twenty times. It is this disproportion which has distorted the truth and led to the error mentioned by us in the earlier paragraphs. Let us now carefully examine these verses.

The passage opens by announcing that Christians have "liberty" (margin) or a "freedom with confidence" to approach unto God, this language presenting a designed contrast from the case of national Israel under the old economy. This liberty to draw near unto the heavenly mercy seat is "by the blood of Jesus." The foundation of all confidence in our access to God and the title to approach unto Him lies in the infinitely meritorious sacrifice which Christ offered unto God on our behalf, and this we must ever plead before Him. Our encouragement so to do lies in the office which our Saviour now exercises on behalf of His people, namely, "high priest over the house of God." This is most blessedly brought before us in, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly [freely] unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:15-16).

In what next follows in our passage, we are shown the way or manner in which we are to make use of the unspeakable privilege described in verses 19-21. In other words, we are required to meet the terms of verse 22 if we are to enjoy conscious access unto the thrice holy God. First, let us draw near with "a true heart." This is the principal qualification. A "true heart" is one that beats true unto God. It denotes sincerity in contrast from hypocrisy. It is not the reverent posture of the body or the language of the lips with which God is chiefly concerned, but rather with the heart—the seat of our affections. They who worship Him, "must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Joh 4:24), or their performance is utterly futile. The mere outward performance of religious duties, no matter how scrupulously undertaken, is not sufficient—it is with the sincerity of our hearts God has chief regard to in all our approaches unto Him. God will bear with infirmities, but not with hypocrisy.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." This makes known the principle which is to be exercised in our approaches unto God, for, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). None but a genuine believer can obtain access unto God, all others are rigidly excluded. There must be the actual exercise of faith in every spiritual work, "by faith Abel offered unto God," etc. (Heb 11:4). The "full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22) does not here signify a firm knowledge of our sonship, but an implicit confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood. Many Hebrews who had received in general the faith of the

Gospel were wavering in their minds about the person and office of Christ, and the glorious things predicated of Him by the apostle, and therefore he stresses the fact there must be a firm conviction of the reality and efficacy of the atonement if we are to draw near unto God.

“Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). Here is the twofold preparation prescribed unto us for the right performance of this duty. In these expressions there is an obvious allusion unto the necessary preparations for divine worship made by Israel under Judaism. As there were various ways in which the Jews became ceremonially and legally defiled, so there were various means appointed for their purification (Heb 9:13). Those institutions the apostle now applies spiritually, “our hearts” and “our bodies” signify the inward and the outward man. “Bodies washed with pure water” has no reference to baptism, but is to be understood of our members being preserved from evil and used for God. Rightly did John Owen (1616-1683) say at the close of his exposition of these verses, “Universal sanctification upon our whole persons and the mortification in an especial manner of outward sins are required of us in our drawing nigh unto God.”

“Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb 10:22) has reference to an efficacious application of the blood of Christ unto sanctification or internal purification, so that the burden of guilt is removed. This is accomplished originally in the communication of regenerating grace at the new birth, and is repeated whenever the Spirit grants a fresh renewal and experience of the virtues of the atonement. That a good conscience is an indispensable qualification for access to God is seen from, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14), where “serve” signifies communion and worship. When the conscience is unpurged, the weight of condemnation lies so heavily upon it that we are then at a loss in approaching the Holy One.

Now to sum up. It is one thing to know theoretically the legal way and right of approach unto God, but it is quite another to enjoy conscious access to Him. For that, the aid of the Spirit is imperative, but He will not perform His gracious operations within us if He be grieved. If we have spent the night in ransacking the newspapers, in worldly conversation, or in backbiting the servants and saints of God, think you that the Holy Spirit will draw out your heart unto the Father when you perform your evening devotions? Not so, unless you penitently confess those sins, and sincerely determine there shall be no repetition of them. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (Jam 4:8). What has been before us was strikingly foreshadowed of old in connection with the approach of Israel’s priests unto God—first the blood was applied to their persons, then the oil (emblem of the Spirit), and then they washed at the laver.

## PATIENCE

Letter by W. J. Brook (1811)—“As I gathered from your letter that the Lord Himself had been your Teacher, in an immediate way, not by the usual means, He, no doubt, continues that good work He has begun, and in His own way, for His work is all of a piece, and like His Word, is perfect—and in no two does it appear alike in all its circumstances, though in substance the same. Every man has his peculiar measure of faith and grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Some have trials different from others, but all have a corrupt nature, a never-ceasing adversary, and a wicked world to pass through and contend with. Many set off to run through this

host in hope of obtaining the prize at the end, for it is the good thing at the end that sets all off who run in the race, that is not to the swift. Legal obedience never made a man run. The fear of destruction drives them to their service, and the terrible majesty of God, clothed in clouds and darkness, urges them to their duty, and self-will and self-pleasing help them on. David says, 'I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.' It is a sense of the Lord's goodness, felt now, that animates us to run after His everlasting favour and life. But this must be run with patience, 'Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain.'

"Many have started with me whom I have envied, and looking at one and another, have secretly and openly repined that I have not this man's strength, and that man's liveliness—making sure that they must obtain. Then one has outstripped me a vast way, and I have apparently lost ground by looking at the different competitors, and have concluded that let him who might receive the prize, I never should. So has my heart fretted against the Lord, because He has not given me what I have seen and admired in others. But after a while I have seen the strongest stand still, unable to go on—and finding they could not succeed, out of envy and malice, through disappointment, have given up and wandered from the way of understanding. Others have held on, but gradually grown feeble, lost their vigour and alacrity through the entanglements of the world, and at last, when almost apparently at the point when they should receive, have been left destitute of that faith by which we enter into rest.

"Some keep on, as Paul says, from mere envy and strife, and are never so much alive, so strong, so zealous, and so earnest, as when they have a saint to revile, to oppose—and all of this in pretense of love to Christ, supposing to add affliction to our bonds. And after all this I remain, and am obliged to look within at the work of the Lord in me, and every examination and proof only serves to make me satisfied from myself, not with myself, but from myself, from that fountain of Israel, which, in Christ Jesus, I have ever found when needed in my heart, and I believe some of it has run out and refreshed others also.

"And now I find that I much need patience, to let everyone go on his own pace, envying none, but to be content with the portion appointed for me, and to bear up under all the disappointments, vexations, burdens, and troubles I meet with, often thinking I stand quite still, or rather am driven back. But upon the whole, find this to be true, 'Having obtained help of God, I continue to this day.' But nothing does allure, animate, or communicate strength save our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore I look to Him as the Author and Finisher of my faith, through the grace that is given unto me, and a view of His love in undertaking and finishing for me the whole of my salvation—attended with a rich experience in my soul, which wonderfully charms, draws, and invigorates my spirit, till I forget the difficulties, in the kindness of Him who bears me up and bears me along.

"As to perplexing ourselves with anything beside (if there were anything beside them) the keeping these two commandments, it is fruitless, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' and 'love one another,' as He hath given us commandment. These are the only two things which John says are not grievous, they bring no trouble nor disappointment in themselves, though to keep them must be in opposition to the most dreadful enemies of our Lord. But He who gives us power to believe and teaches us to love, also keeps us, and that as the apple of the eye. We are made the tenderest part of Himself, by union with Him. And in us and through us the glory of God and of His Son shines forth with lustre to all eternity, all His perfections being in us—'out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.' It is His gentleness which is His eyelid, and which preserves or keeps us. How insensible is the twinkling of the eye, yet most effectual. We do not always observe it, because it is momentary.

“The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went, and he says it was His gentleness made him great. But when observed, there is a sweet peace, quietness, and unction attended with a clear and blessed discovery and vision of the goodness of the Lord. And we can plainly make out what the psalmist means when he says, ‘The LORD’s eyelids try the children of men’—since His gentleness, goodness, and peaceableness have never met with any other return than perverseness, rebellion, enmity, and ingratitude. The hardness and impenitence of the heart none know but they who understand the goodness of the Lord, and are brought to loathe themselves for their iniquity. And then they can see and feel that of all injured beings, God stands first and most. Yet does this place Him in the most honourable and admirable of all points of view, secures to Himself a full justification, and brings all the guilt of sin and all the charge of destruction upon the sinners among men—so that all flesh must be silent when He rises up out of His holy habitation.”

Spiritual patience is something more than a passive grace which enables us to meekly endure trials and quietly wait the Lord’s deliverance. It is also an active principle which causes us to run the race set before us, which prompts us to persevere in the face of discouragements, which moves us to hope unto the end. It must not be mistaken for that natural listlessness or fatalistic inertia which is often wrongly termed “patience.”



# September

## **THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL**

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). This verse contains a brief epitome of the whole plan of salvation. It states what God has done for the justification of His people, and therefore it is of special interest as presenting in concise form the testimony of the Spirit on that all-important subject. Every word in it calls for separate consideration, prayerful and most careful consideration, for an erroneous understanding of any of its clauses will involve us in fundamental and vile error. On the other hand, if the Lord be pleased to open up this verse to our spiritual perceptions, we cannot but be filled with wonderment and praise—with awe and fervent thanksgiving.

Last month we observed that our passage presents to us three things regarding God the Father, and now we are to notice the three things which it contains concerning the Son—these are His purity, His sufferings, and His merits. First, His ineffable innocence. He “knew no sin.” The immaculate purity of Christ is a most delightful subject of meditation, living as we are in an evil world and harassed by the sin of iniquity which still indwells us. Three inspired declarations need to be particularly weighed in this connection, “in him is no sin” (1Jo 3:5), “who did no sin” (1Pe 2:22), “who did no sin.” Christ was the Lamb of God “without blemish and without spot,” as such He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26).

By His miraculous conception, the Lord Christ was exempted from the contagion of original sin which defiles every fallen descendant of Adam. To Mary it was said, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luk 1:35). The purity of Christ was immaculate, impeccable, immutable. He was free from any actual transgression. Though the hottest of Satan’s fiery darts were shot at Him, yet there was not the slightest defect in His holiness, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Joh 14:30). Though subjected to the greatest indignities, and the strongest provocations, yet, “He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” To the worst of His enemies He issued this challenge, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (Joh 8:46).

But this expression, “who knew no sin” (2Co 5:21), goes even further than those we have glanced at above, for it conveys far more than the bare assertion that Christ was sinless. It places Him at the greatest possible distance from sin. This emphatic assertion that He “knew no sin” can only be rightly understood as we balance it against the opposing clause—“that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” Now we “know” righteousness only as something which is entirely foreign to our nature as fallen creatures, and have no subjective apprehension of it until

we are justified by faith. In like manner Christ “knew” sin only as something which was absolutely foreign to His nature, as something entirely apart from Himself, as something which as the Holy One He utterly abhorred, and of which He had no subjective consciousness until our sins were laid upon Him.

The incalculable sufferings of Christ are here summarized in the words, “made to be sin for us” (2Co 5:21), which is a comprehensive expression including the whole of what the Saviour was called upon to endure while making atonement for His people. But before examining this unspeakably solemn word, let it first be pointed out that, to be without sin was an indispensable qualification of Christ’s becoming our sin-bearer—dimly foreshadowed under the ceremonial law where only animals that were, “without blemish” could be used for sacrificial purposes. Our High Priest had to be entirely without any personal sin in order to offer an unspotted sacrifice to satisfy God’s justice and merit His favour. Second, it must also be most clearly understood that in being “made sin for us” the immaculate nature of the Redeemer underwent no change, nor was the holiness of His person sullied to the slightest degree. He took upon Him neither the taint nor pollution of sin—His peerless perfections and glory remained unspotted throughout.

“He hath made him [to be] sin for us.” What an amazing statement is this and how unspeakably solemn. Who with the fear of God in his heart would ever have dared to make such a predication were he not first assured of its verity from Holy Writ—that the Holy One should be “made sin.” This does not mean that Christ was made sin experimentally, but rather judicially—not by impartation but by imputation. The Greek word which is here rendered “made” (*poieo*) is the one found in, “I will make you fishers of men” (Mat 4:19)—something which they were not formerly and naturally. In Mark 3:14, the same word is translated, “And he ordained twelve that they should be with him.” It occurs again in connection with the Saviour in, “God hath made that same Jesus, “whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ” (Act 2:36), which refers not to His nature and condition, but to His status and position.

The usage of “*poieo*” in the above passages helps us to gather the force of it in “He hath made him to be sin” (2Co 5:21). God ordained and ordered that His Son should be made sin—He appointed that Christ should be legally constituted such. But what is meant by God’s having constituted Christ “sin”? To be a sin-offering say some, to bear its penalty say others. But neither of these explanations go back far enough. Nothing could be made an expiatory sacrifice unless and until sin had been imputed to it, and punishment necessarily presupposes guilt, for the innocent cannot be justly penalized. The key which unlocks this mystery is found in the words “The LORD hath laid on him [the Mediator] the iniquity [not of “all” but] of us all” (Isa 53:6). The guilt of all the sins of God’s people was charged to the account of the Redeemer, and the law dealt with Him accordingly.

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *14. Prayer—Matthew 6:14-15*

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat 6:14-15). These verses have received scant attention from most of those who have written on the Lord’s Prayer. This ought not to be, for they form a most important appendix to and round the teaching

of our Lord begun at verse 6. It is significant to observe that the fifth petition in the family prayer is the only one singled out by Christ for specific comment—probably because the duty enforced in it is the most painful of all to flesh and blood. But however distasteful the contents of these verses may be to our sinful hearts, that is no reason why they should be virtually shelved by most of the commentators.

Timely indeed are the brief remarks of Matthew Henry (1662-1714) thereon, “If we pray in anger, we have reason to fear that God will answer us in anger. What reason is it that God should forgive us the talents (huge sums) we are indebted to Him, if we forgive not our brethren the pence they are indebted to us? Christ came into the world as the great Peace-Maker—not only to reconcile us to God, but to one another, and in this we must comply with Him. It is a great presumption and of dangerous consequences for anyone to make a light matter of that which Christ lays such a stress upon. Men’s passions must not frustrate God’s Word.” Far too weighty and momentous are these solemn and searching declarations of the Lord Jesus to be summarily dismissed with a brief and light notice of them.

It was the comparative failure of Christian expositors in the past to adequately explain and enforce the teaching of Christ in the verses now before us, which made it so much easier for modern errorists to foist their evil perversions on the uninstructed and unwary. For example, take the following footnote from the “Scofield Reference Bible,” “This is legal ground. Compare Ephesians 4:32 which is grace. Under the law forgiveness was conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.” This is a fair sample of the vicious method followed by “Dispensationalists,” who (under the pretense of “rightly dividing the word of truth”), delight in pitting the Old Testament against the New, and lowering the standard of Christianity, presenting a fictitious “grace” which does not “reign through righteousness” (Rom 5:21). Let us briefly examine this statement of Scofield’s, which has misled thousands.

By saying that because our receiving divine forgiveness is dependent upon our forgiving those who wrong us is “legal ground,” attempt is made to set aside the Lord’s positive declaration. In the added statement, “Compare Ephesians 4:32 which is grace,” we are asked to believe that Matthew 6:14-15 pertains not at all to this Christian era. This is made quite plain in what follows where this “renowned Bible teacher” opposes the one to the other. “Under the law forgiveness was conditioned upon a like spirit in us, under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.” Such a declaration betrays the mental confusion of its author. Under no dispensation has God ever bestowed mercy upon any who maintained a vindictive spirit, nor does He now—were He to do so, it would not be “grace,” but a disgrace to His holiness. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament economy penitent souls were pardoned for Christ’s sake, as truly as believers are today. There is no conflict between the law and the Gospel—the one is the handmaid of the other.

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” What analogy is there between our forgiving of others and God’s forgiving us? Let us begin with the negative side. First, it is not because our forgiving those who wrong us is in any sense or degree a meritorious act which deserves well at the hands of God. The meritorious ground on which God pardons our sins is the atonement of Christ, and that alone. Our best performances are imperfect and in no way proportionate to the mercies we receive from God. What proportion is there between God’s pardoning of us and our pardoning of others, either with respect to the parties interested in the action, the subject matter, the manner of performance, or the issues of the action?

God has laid a law upon us that we should forgive others, and compliance therewith is simply discharging our duty, and not something by which we bring the Lord into debt to us.

Second, it is not a rule so that our forgiving others should be a pattern of forgiving to God. “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven” does denote a conformity of the one to the other—but “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” is not a pattern or rule. We are to be imitators of God, but He does not imitate us in pardoning offenders—it would fare ill with us indeed if God were to forgive us no better than we forgive one another. God is matchless in all His works and all His ways. Let it be duly noted that when He declares, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9), it is specifically said in connection with His “abundant pardon” (see verse 7).

Third, nor do these words, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you” signify a priority of order, as though our acts had the precedence of God’s, or as if we could heartily forgive others before God had shown mercy to us. No—in all acts of love God is first. His mercy to us is the cause of our mercy to others. In the great parable on forgiveness (Mat 18:23-35), which forms the best commentary on the verses now before us, God’s forgiving us is the motive of our forgiving, “I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Mat 18:32-33). So again, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32)—in that manner, according to that example.

Turning now to the positive side. “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Mat 6:14). Very searching indeed are these words, constituting a severe test of discipleship, a test which excludes from the ranks of God’s children those professors who cherish a spirit of malignity and revenge, refusing to forgive those who injure them. Unless our pride be truly broken by a sense of sin so that we are not only willing to forgive others, but also rejoice in those opportunities for exercising (in some small degree at least) that lovingkindness which we ourselves stand in such sore need of from God, then we are not really penitent in heart and therefore cannot be pardoned ourselves. If our prayers are to be acceptable unto God we must “lift up holy hands, without wrath” (see 1Ti 2:8).

First, our forgiveness of others is a condition or necessary qualification if we are to receive the continued pardon of God. “For if we forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Mat 6:14). These two are definitely joined together and must not be separated by us. Divine forgiveness always presupposes our repentance. It is not bestowed on that account, yet it is inseparably connected with it. Unless we forgive those who injure us, we are in no moral condition ourselves to receive the mercy of God. We have no Scriptural warrant whatever to expect the divine pardon while we refuse to pardon those who have trespassed against us. It is quite wrong to limit this by saying that we cannot expect the comfort of God’s pardon—so long as we indulge implacable resentment, it is presumptuous for us to hope for divine mercy.

Second, as intimated above, our forgiveness of others is a mark or sign that we ourselves have been pardoned of God. “Hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3) was our condition by nature, but if by grace we have drunk of the blessed spirit of the Redeemer then shall we, like Him (Luk 23:34), pray for our enemies. Said the beloved apostle, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering” (1Ti 1:16). Where the grace of God has wrought a miracle in the human heart graciousness is the inevitable effect. Reconciliation with God is made manifest by a conciliatory spirit to our fellows. If God has

softened our hearts, how can we be hard and mercilessly exacting toward others? “There is none so tender to others as they which have received mercy themselves, that know how gently God hath dealt with them” (Thomas Manton, 1620-1677).

Third, the joining together of our forgiving of others with God’s forgiving of us is in order to show this is a duty incumbent upon those who are pardoned. God has laid this necessity upon us. Every time we beg His pardon we are to remind ourselves most solemnly of this duty and bind ourselves to it in the sight of God. So that when we pray, “Forgive us our debts,” we are required to add, “as we forgive our debtors” (Mat 6:12). It is a definite undertaking on our part, a formal promise which we make to God. His showing of mercy to us will incline us to show mercy unto others. In all earnest requests, we are to bind ourselves to the corresponding duties. In asking for our daily bread, we pledge ourselves to labour for it. In asking that we may not be led into temptation, we agree not to place a stumblingblock before others.

Fourth, it is an argument inspiring confidence in God’s pardoning mercy. We, who have still so much of the old leaven of revenge left in us, find that the receiving of a spark of grace enkindles in our hearts a readiness to forgive those who injure us, what may we not expect from God! Clearly this is what is urged in, “Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us” (Luk 11:4). If we who have so little grace find it possible to be magnanimous, how much more so shall the God of all grace exceed the creature in this! The same kind of reasoning was employed by Christ in His, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him” (Mat 7:11). Since fallen man is moved with affection toward his weak and needy offspring, certainly the Father of mercies will not be indifferent to our wants.

We must next inquire what is meant by our forgiving those who trespass against us. Before answering this question in detail it should be pointed out that we can only forgive those injuries which are directly against ourselves, for none but God can forgive those which are against Himself—He alone can remit that punishment which is due to the transgressor for the violation of His law. It should also be premised that we are not required to forgive those injuries done to us which constitute a flagrant violation of the laws of the land, whereby the offender has committed a serious crime, for it belongs not to a private person to condone evil doing or to obstruct the course of justice. Yet if we have recourse to human courts for the redress of wrongs, it must not be in a spirit of malice, but only for the glory of God and the public good.

What is meant by our forgiving others? First, forbearing ourselves and withholding revenge. “Say not, I will do to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Pro 24:29). Corrupt nature thirsts for retaliation, but grace must suppress it. If someone has slandered us, that does not warrant us to slander them. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Pro 16:32). We rule our spirit when we overcome our passion. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21), for this will shame the offender if his conscience be not utterly calloused. When David had Saul at an advantage and forbore any act of revenge against him, Saul acknowledged, “Thou art more righteous than I” (1Sa 24:17).

Second, Christians are required not only to forbear the avenging of themselves, but actually to pardon those who have wronged them. There must be the laying aside of all anger and hatred, and the exercise of love toward my neighbour, remembering that by nature I am no better than the offender (Gal 6:1). If we have genuinely pardoned the one who has injured us, we shall earnestly desire that God will pardon him too, as Stephen prayed for his enemies, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Act 7:60). This forgiveness must be sincere and from the heart. When Joseph’s

brethren submitted themselves to him, he not only remitted their offenses, but “comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” (Gen 50:21).

Third, we must be ready to perform all the offices of love unto those who have wronged us, if the offending one be not a brother in Christ, yet is he still your fellow creature. Nor must you so magnify his faults as to be blind to his compensating virtues. We are required to do good unto those that hate us (Luk 6:27) and to pray for those who despitely use us and persecute us (Mat 5:44). Though Miriam had wronged Moses, yet he prayed to the Lord for her forgiveness and healing (Num 12:13). And surely it is fitting that we who need mercy ourselves should show mercy unto others. It is a general rule that we should do as we would be done unto. How we need to pray for more grace if we are to be gracious unto others!

But are we required to forgive offenders absolutely and unconditionally, whether they express contrition or not? Certainly not. A holy God does not require us to condone evil-doing and countenance sin. The teaching of our Lord on this point is crystal clear. First we are bidden to seek out the offender, privately and meekly, and expostulate with him, endeavouring to make him see that he has displeased the Lord and wronged his own soul more than he has us (Mat 5:23-24; 18:15). Second, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luk 17:3-4). But suppose the offender evidences no sign of repentance? Even then, we must not harbour any malice or any revenge, yet we are not to act as freely and familiarly as before. Third, we are to pray for him.

“But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat 6:15). Unspeakably solemn is this, and each of us needs to diligently search his heart in the light of it. Let us bear in mind that other declaration of Christ’s, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Mat 7:2). God’s government is a reality, and He sees to it that whatsoever we sow that do we also reap. The same truth, in principle, is enunciated in, “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard” (Pro 21:13). Many an earnest prayer is offered which never reaches the ear of God. Why is it that such a verse as, “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy” (Jam 2:13) has no place in the preaching of our day? How much that is distasteful to flesh and blood is withheld by men-pleasers! Such will never receive the Master’s, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mat 25:23).

It will be seen, then, that the passage we have been considering presents a very real test of discipleship. On the one hand, it shows that if we are merciful to others we shall ourselves “obtain mercy” (Mat 5:7). On the other hand, it teaches that if we retain malice and hatred against those who injure us, then is the hypocrisy of our Christian profession plainly exposed. How necessary it is that we diligently examine our hearts and test ourselves at this point. As a guide therein, ponder before God the following queries—Do I secretly rejoice when I hear of any calamity befalling one who has wronged me? If so, I certainly have not forgiven him. Do I retain in my memory the wrongs suffered and upbraid the transgressor with them? Or assuming he has repented, am I willing and anxious to do whatever I can to help him and promote his interests?

It is abundantly clear from all that has been before us that God’s pardon of our sins and the reformation of our lives go together—the one can only be known by the other. The more our hearts and lives are regulated by a Christ-like spirit, the clearer our evidence that we are new creatures in Him. It is utterly vain for me to believe that I have received the divine pardon if I refuse to forgive those who injure me. True, it is often difficult to forget the wrongs we have forgiven and the injuries we have received may still rankle within us. The flesh is yet in us and

indwelling sin mars all the actings of grace. Yet if we honestly strive to banish ill will and seek to cherish a meek disposition toward our enemies, we may comfort ourselves that God will be gracious unto us, for His love is infinitely superior to ours. If our hearts condemn us not then do we have confidence toward Him.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### *9. At Zarephath*

In that which is now to be before us, we are to behold how the prophet conducted himself in quite different surroundings and circumstances from those which have previously engaged our attention. Hitherto we have seen something of how he acquitted himself in public—his courage and spiritual dignity before Ahab and also how he acted in private—his life in secret before God by the brook—obedient unto the word of the Lord, patiently waiting His next marching orders. But here the Spirit grants us a view of how Elijah conducted himself in the home of the widow at Zarephath, revealing as it does most blessedly the sufficiency of divine grace for God's servants and people in every situation in which they may find themselves. Alas, how often the servant of God who is uncompromising in public and faithful in his secret devotions, fails lamentably in the domestic sphere, the family circle. This should not be, nor was it so with Elijah, by God's grace.

That to which we have just alluded calls perhaps for a few remarks, which we offer not by way of extenuation but of explanation. Why is it that the servant of God is often seen to far less advantage in the home than he is in the pulpit or the closet? In the first place, as he goes forth to discharge his public duties he is keyed up to do battle against the enemy, but he returns home with his nervous energy spent, to relax and recuperate. Then it is that he is more easily upset and irritated by comparative trifles. In the second place, in his public ministry he is conscious that he is opposing the powers of evil, but in the family circle he is surrounded by those who love him, and is more off his guard, failing to realize that Satan may use his friends to gain an advantage over him. Third, conscious faithfulness in public may have stimulated his pride and a thorn in the flesh—the painful realization of sad failure in the home—may be necessary to humble him. Yet there is no more justification for God-dishonouring conduct in the domestic circle than in the pulpit.

Last month, we reached the point where Elijah—in response to JEHOVAH'S orders—had left his retirement at Cherith, had crossed the desert, and had duly arrived at the gates of Zarephath, where the Lord had (secretly) commanded a widow woman to sustain him. He encountered her at the entrance of the town, though under circumstances which presented a most unpromising appearance to carnal sight. Instead of this woman joyfully welcoming the prophet, she dolefully spoke of the impending death of herself and son. Instead of being amply furnished to minister unto Elijah, she tells him that “a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse” was all she had left. What a testing of faith! How unreasonable it seemed that the man of God should expect sustenance under her roof. No more unreasonable than that Noah should be required to build an ark before there was any rain, still less any signs of a flood. No more unreasonable than that Israel should be required to simply walk round and round the walls of Jericho. The path of obedience can only be trodden as faith is in exercise.

“And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said” (1Ki 17:13). What a gracious word was this to quieten the poor widow’s heart! Be not afraid of the consequences, either to yourself or to your son, in making use of the means to hand, scant though they be. “But make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son” (1Ki 17:13). What a severe testing was this! Was ever a poor widow so sorely tried, before or since? To make him a cake “first” was surely, in her extreme circumstances, one of the hardest commands ever given. Did it not appear to issue from the very essence of selfishness? Did either the laws of God or of man require a sacrifice like this? God has never bidden us do more than love our neighbour as ourself, nowhere has He bidden us to love him better. But here, “make me a cake first”!

“For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” (1Ki 17:14). Ah, that made all the difference—that removed the sting from the request, showing there was no selfishness inspiring the same. She was asked for a portion of that little which she had remaining, but Elijah tells her she need not hesitate to bestow it, for although the case seemed desperate, God would take care of her and of her son. Observe with what implicit confidence the prophet spoke. There was no uncertainty, but positive and unwavering assurance that their supply should not diminish. Ah, Elijah had learned a valuable lesson at Cherith—learned it experimentally. He had proved the faithfulness of JEHOVAH by the brook, and therefore was he now qualified to quieten the fears and comfort the heart of this poor widow—compare 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 which reveals the secret of all effective ministry.

Observe the particular title here accorded deity. The woman had said, “As the LORD thy God liveth” (1Ki 17:12), but this was not sufficient. Elijah declared, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel” (1Ki 17:14). This Gentile must be made to realize the humbling truth that “salvation is of the Jews” (Joh 4:22). “The LORD God of Israel”—of whose wondrous works you must have heard so much. The One who made a footstool of the haughty Pharaoh, who brought His people through the Red Sea dry-shod, who miraculously sustained them for forty years in the wilderness, and who subdued the Canaanites for them. Such a One may surely be trusted for our daily bread. The “LORD God of Israel” is He whose promise never fails, for “The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent” or change His mind (1Sa 15:29). Such a One may be safely relied upon.

“For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” (1Ki 17:14). God gave her His word of promise to rest upon. Could she rely upon it? Would she really trust Him? Note how definite was the promise—it was not merely, God will not suffer thee to starve, or will surely supply all your need. Rather was it as though the prophet had said, The meal in thy barrel shall not diminish nor the oil in thy cruse dry up. And if our faith be a divinely-sustained one, it will cause us to trust in God’s promise to commit ourselves unreservedly to His care, and to do good unto our fellow creatures. But observe how faith must continue in exercise—no new barrel of meal was promised or furnished—just an undiminished “handful”—seemingly a very inadequate quantity for the family, but quite sufficient with God. “Until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” (1Ki 17:14) evidenced the firm faith of the prophet himself.

“And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days” (1Ki 17:15). Who can forbear exclaiming, O woman great is thy faith! She might have advanced many excuses to the prophet’s request, especially as he was a stranger to her, but great as the test was, her faith in the Lord was equal to it. Her simple trust that God would take

care of them overcame all the objections of carnal reason. Does she not remind us of another Gentile woman, the Syro-Phoenician, a descendant of the idolatrous Canaanites, who long afterwards welcomed the appearance of Christ to the borders of Tyre, and who sought His aid on behalf of her demon distressed daughter? With astonishing faith she overcame every obstacle, and obtained a portion of the children's bread in the healing of her daughter (Mat 15:28). Would that such cases moved us to cry from our hearts, "Lord, Increase our faith" (Luk 17:5), for none but He who bestows faith can increase it.

"And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah" (1Ki 17:15-16). She was no loser by her generosity. Her little supply of meal and oil was but sufficient for a single meal and then she and her son must die. But her willingness to minister unto God's servant brought her enough, not only for many days, but for several years. She gave Elijah of the best of what she had and for her kindness to him God kept her household clear through the famine. How true it is that, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Mat 10:41). But all of God's people are not granted the privilege of succouring a prophet, yet they may God's poor. Is it not written, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Pro 19:17)? And again, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psa 41:1). God will be no man's debtor.

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail" (1Ki 17:15-16). Here again we have exemplified the fact that the receiving of God's blessing and obtaining of food (in figure, spiritual food) is the result of obedience. This woman complied with the request of God's servant and great was her reward. Are you, my reader, fearful of the future? Are you afraid that when strength fails and old age comes you may be left without the necessities of life? Then suffer us to remind you that there is no need whatever for such fears. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [temporal necessities] shall be added unto you" (Mat 6:33). "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him" (Psa 34:9). "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa 84:11). But note well that each of these promises is conditional. Your business is to give God the first place in your life, to fear, obey, and honour Him in all things, and in return He guarantees your bread and water shall be sure.

Is there a reader inclined to reply, Such wholesome counsel is easier to receive than to act on, to be reminded of God's promises than to rely upon the same. Someone may be disposed to say, Ah, you know not how distressing are my circumstances, how dark the outlook, how sorely Satan is injecting doubts into my mind. True, yet however desperate your case may be, we would earnestly beg you to think upon the widow of Zarephath. It is most unlikely that your situation is anything like as extreme as hers, yet she perished not of starvation. He who puts God first will always find Him with him at the last. Things which seem to be acting against us, work together for our good in His wondrous hands. Whatever be your need, dear friend, forget not Elijah's God.

"And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" (1Ki 17:14-15). Here we see Elijah dwelling safely in the humble abode of this poor widow. Though the fare was frugal, yet it was sufficient to preserve life in the body. There is no hint that God provided any variation of diet during those "many days," nor any intimation that the prophet became dissatisfied with being required to eat the same food over so long a period. This is where we obtain our first glimpse of how he conducted himself within the family circle. Blessedly did he exemplify that divine

precept, “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8). And from where does such contentment proceed? From a submissive and peaceful heart which rests in God—subject to His sovereign pleasure, satisfied with the portion He is pleased to allot us, seeing His hand both in providing and in withholding.

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail” (1Ki 17:16). Certainly the widow had no cause to complain of the severe testing to which her faith had been put. God, who sent His prophet to board with her, paid well for his table—by providing her family with food while her neighbours were starving, and by granting her the company and instruction of His servant. Who can tell what blessing came to her soul under the edifying conversation of Elijah and from the efficacy of his prayers? She was of a humane and generous disposition, ready to relieve the misery of others and minister to the needs of God’s servants, and her liberality was returned to her a hundredfold. Unto the merciful, God shows mercy, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail” (1Ki 17:16). Let us now endeavour to look higher, lest we miss the lovely type which is to be found here. The “meal” is certainly a divinely selected figure of Christ, the “corn of wheat” that died (Joh 12:24), being ground between the upper and nether millstones of divine judgment that He might be unto us the “bread of life” (Joh 6:35). This is clear from the first few chapters of Leviticus, where we have the five great offerings appointed for Israel, which set forth the person and work of the Redeemer—the meal offering of “fine flour” (Lev 2:7) portraying the perfections of His humanity. It is equally clear that the “oil” is an emblem of the Holy Spirit in His anointing, enlightening, and sustaining operations. It is a most blessed line of study to trace through the Scriptures the typical references of the “oil.”

As the little family at Zarephath were not sustained by meal or oil alone, but the two in conjunction, so the believer is not sustained spiritually without both Christ and the Holy Spirit. We could not feed upon Christ, yea, we would never feel our need of so doing, were it not for the gracious influences of the Spirit of God. The one is as indispensable to us as the other—Christ for us, the Spirit in us—the one maintaining our cause on high, the other ministering to us down here. The Spirit is here to “testify” of Christ (Joh 15:26), yea, to “glorify” Him (Joh 16:14), and therefore did the Saviour add, “He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you”—is not this why the “meal” (three times over) is mentioned first in the type? Nor is this the only passage where we see the two types combined. Again and again in the beautiful prefiguration of the Old Testament, we read of the “oil” being placed upon the blood (Exo 29:21; Lev 14:14; etc.).

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail” (1Ki 17:16). There was a steady increase and supply of both according to the mighty power of God working a continuous miracle. Is there not a close parallel between this and the Saviour’s supernatural increasing of the five barley loaves and the two small fishes, while the disciples were distributing and the multitude eating (Mat 14:19-20)? But again we would look from the type to the Antitype. The meal continued undiminished, the supply unabated, and the meal pointed to Christ as the nourisher of our souls. The provision which God has made for His people in the Lord Jesus remains the same throughout the centuries. We may come to Him again and again, and though we receive from Him “grace for grace” yet His “fulness” (Joh 1:16) continues the same “yesterday and to-day and for ever” (Heb 13:8). “Neither did the cruse of oil fail” (1Ki 17:16), foreshadowed the grand truth that the Holy Spirit is with us to the very end of our pilgrimage (Eph 4:30).

But let us point out again that God did not give a new barrel of meal and cruse of oil unto this family at Zarephath, nor did He fill to the brim the old one. There is another important lesson for us in this. God gave them sufficient food for their daily use, but not a whole year's supply in advance or even a week's provision all at once. In like manner, there is no such thing as our laying up for ourselves a stock of grace for future use. We have to go constantly to Christ for fresh supplies of grace. The Israelites were expressly forbidden to hoard up the manna. They had to go out and gather it anew each morning. We cannot procure sufficient sustenance for our souls on the Sabbath to last us throughout the week, but must feed on God's Word each morning. So, too, though we have been regenerated by the Spirit once and for all, yet He renews us in the inner man "day by day" (2Co 4:16).

"According to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah" (1Ki 17:16). This was illustrative and demonstrative of a vital principle—no word of His shall fall to the ground, but all things "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"—(Act 3:21)—shall surely be accomplished. This is both solemn and blessed. Solemn, because the threatenings of Holy Writ are not idle ones, but the faithful warnings of Him that cannot lie. Just as surely as Elijah's declaration, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1Ki 17:1) was fulfilled to the letter, so will the Most High make good every judgment He has announced against the wicked. Blessed, because as truly as the widow's meal and oil failed not according to His word through Elijah, so shall every promise made to His saints yet receive its perfect accomplishment. The unimpeachable veracity, unchanging faithfulness, and all-mighty power of God to make good His Word is the impregnable foundation on which faith may securely rest.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY**

### *4. Its Roots*

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no voice or pen can adequately portray the awful state of wretchedness and woe into which sin has cast guilty man. It has separated him from God, and so has severed him from the only source of holiness and true happiness. It has ruined him in spirit and soul and body. By the Fall, man not only plunged himself into a state of infinite guilt from which there is no deliverance, except sovereign grace unite him with the Mediator, but by his apostasy man has lost his holiness, and is wholly corrupt and under the dominion of dispositions or lusts which are directly contrary to God and His law (Rom 8:7). The Fall has brought man into love of sin and hatred of God. The corruption of man's being is so great and so entire that he will never truly repent or even have any right exercises toward God and His law unless and until he is supernaturally renewed by the Holy Spirit.

If any reader is inclined to think we have just painted too dark a picture or have exaggerated the case of the fallen creature, then we ask him to carefully ponder the second half of Romans 7, and note how human nature is there represented as so totally depraved as to be utterly unable not merely to keep God's law perfectly, but unable to do anything agreeable to it. "The law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin....For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not....I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into

captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:14, 18, 23). How completely at variance is that language from the sentiments which prevail in Christendom today! Paul, that most eminent Christian, nothing behind the chief of the apostles, at the very time of penning this epistle, when he considered what he was in himself, confessed that he was “sold under sin.”

The apostle’s phrase, “in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18), as may be seen by tracing it through the New Testament, imports “in me by nature”—there is nothing in me naturally good. But ere proceeding further, let us seek to carefully define what is signified by the term “the natural man” or “man by nature.” It is not meant the human nature itself, or man as a tri partite being of spirit and soul and body, for then we should include the Lord Jesus Christ, who truly and really assumed human nature, becoming the Son of man. No, this term connotes not man as created, but man as corrupted. God did not in creation plant in us a principle of contrariety to Himself, for He fashioned man after His own image and likeness. He made him upright, holy. It was our defection from Him which plunged us into such immeasurable wretchedness and woe—which polluted and defiled all the springs of our being and corrupted all our faculties.

As the result of the Fall, man is the inveterate enemy of God, not only because of what he does, but because of what he now is in himself. “What kind of enmity this is. First, I understand it of nature, not of actions only. Every action of a natural man is an enemy’s action, but not an action of enmity. A toad doth not envenom every spire of grass it crawls upon nor poison everything it toucheth, but its nature is poisonous. Certainly every man’s nature is worse than his actions—as waters are purest at the fountain, and poison most pernicious in the mass, so is enmity in the heart. And its waters partake of the mineral vein they run through, so the actions of a wicked man are tinctured with the enmity they spring from, but the mass and strength of this is lodged in his nature. There is in all our natures such a diabolical contrariety to God, that if God should leave a man to the current of his own heart, it would overflow in all kinds of wickedness” (Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680).

It is quite true that their fearful enmity against God is less openly displayed by some than others, but this is not because they are any better in themselves than those who cast off all pretenses of decency. No, their moderation in wickedness is to be attributed unto the greater restraints which God places upon them, either by the secret workings of His Spirit upon their hopes and fears, or by His external providences—such as education, religious instruction, the subduing influence of the pious. But none is born into this world with the slightest spark of love to God in him. “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent” (Psa 58:3-4)—the poison of a serpent is radically the same in all of its species.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Joh 3:6). These words make it clear that inherent corruption is derived to us by birth. This is evident from the remainder of the verse, “and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The “spirit” which is begotten differs from the Spirit who is the Begetter, and signifies that new creation of holiness which is wrought in the soul and inherent therein, and therefore it is called “the seed of God” (see 1Jo 3:9). As, then, “spirit” here unquestionably notes out the new nature or principle of holiness, so the “flesh” in John 3:6 stands for the old nature or principle of sin. This is further established by Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things which ye would”—“flesh” and “spirit” are there put as two inherent qualities conveyed by two several births, and so are therein opposed. That the “flesh” refers to our very nature as corrupt is seen from the fact that it has “works” or fruits. The flesh is a principle from which operations issue, as buds from a root.

The scope of Christ in John 3 shows that “flesh” has reference to the corruption of our nature. His evident design in those verses was to show what imperative need there is for fallen man to be regenerated. Now regeneration is nothing else but a working of new spiritual dispositions in the whole man, called there “spirit,” without which it is impossible that he should enter the kingdom of God. “For,” says Christ, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” (Joh 3:6), by which He must make it the direct contrary to the spirit of holiness which is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. Had we derived only guilt from Adam we should need only justification, but since we also derived corruption of nature we need regeneration, too.

There is, then, in every man born into this world a mass of corruption that inheres or sticks to him, which is the principle of all his activities, whence they proceed—yea, which may justly be termed his “nature,” for it is the predominant quality which is in all and directs all that issues from him. Let us now proceed to the proof of this compound assertion. First, it is a mass of corruption, for that which our Lord called “flesh” in John 3:6 is denominated “the old man, which is corrupt” by His apostle in Ephesians 4:22. Observe carefully what is clearly implied by this term, and see again how perfectly one part of Scripture harmonizes with another. “Corruption” necessarily denotes something which was previously good, and so it is with man. God made him righteous, now he is defiled. Instead of having a holy soul, it is depraved—instead of an immortal body, it has within it even now the seeds of putrefaction.

Second, we have said that this corruption sticks or cleaves to man’s very nature. It is expressly said to dwell within him, “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:17-18). Man, then, has not only acts of sin which are transient, which come from him and go away, but he has a root and spring of sin dwelling within, residing in him, not only adjacent to but actually inhabiting him. It is not simply our ways and works, but “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” Nor is this something which we acquire through association with the wicked, but rather that which we bring with us into the world, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Pro 22:15).

Third, we have stated that this indwelling corruption is the predominant principle of all the actions of unregenerate man, that from which all proceeds. Surely this is clear from, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, etc.” (Gal 5:19-21). The “flesh” is here said to have works or fruits, and this is a quality in man’s nature bearing the same—note “hatred” and “wrath” are not deeds of the body, but dispositions of the soul and affections of the heart, so that the “flesh” cannot be restricted unto our physical structure. This evil principle or corruption is divinely denominated a “root.” “Lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood” (Deu 29:18 and cf. Heb 12:15). It is a root which brings forth “gall and wormwood,” that is, the bitter fruits of sin, yea it is said to “bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom 7:5).

Fourth, we have affirmed that there is a mass of this corruption which thoroughly affects and defiles man’s being. This is confirmed by the fact that in Colossians 2:11 it is called a “body,” which has many members, “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” This body of the sins of the flesh is of abounding dimensions, a body which has internal and external, gross and more secret lusts, such as atheism, contempt and hatred of God, which is not fully perceived by man until the Holy Spirit pierces him to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. That this corruption lies in the very nature of man appears from the psalmist’s statement, “Behold, I was

shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). David is there confessing the spring from which his great act of sin sprang, I have not only committed the awful act of adultery, but there is even in my inward parts (cf. v. 6) sin defiling me from the moment I was conceived.

Finally, we have declared that this corruption may, in a very real sense, be termed the nature of man. Once more we appeal to John 3:6 in proof, for there it is predicated in the abstract, which implies more than a simple quality, even such as explains what is the very definition and nature of man. The Lord Jesus did not say merely, “That which is born of the flesh is fleshly,” but “is flesh.” Therein Christ framed a new definition of man, in excess of any the philosophers have framed of him. Philosophers define man to be a rational animal, but the Son of God announces him to be flesh, that is, sin and corruption contrary to grace and holiness, this being his very nature in the sight of God as a fallen creature. The very fact that this definition of man’s nature is, as it were, in the abstract, argues that it is a thing inherent in us. But let us enlarge a little upon this point.

Definitions are taken from things bred in nature and none but essential properties are ingredients in definitions. Definitions are taken from the most predominant qualities. Sinful corruption is a more predominant principle in man’s nature than is reason itself, for it not only guides reason, but it resides in every part and faculty of man, as reason does not. Yea, this corruption is so essential and predominant, and so universally diffused through the whole man that there is a mutual predication between man and it. As in John 3:6, the whole of man’s nature is designated “flesh,” so in Ephesians 4:22, this corruption is called man, “Put off...the old man, which is corrupt.” Obviously we cannot “put off” our essential substance or discard our very selves, but that which is sinful and foul. It is called “the old man” because inherited from Adam and because it is contrasted from our new nature.

Man’s nature, then, which has become corrupt and termed flesh, is a bundle of folly and vileness, and it is this which renders him totally impotent to all good. Thus Scripture speaks of “the bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21) and declares men to be “the servants [Greek, “slaves”] of corruption” (2Pe 2:19). Slow as any are to acknowledge this humbling truth, yet the solemn fact that the very nature of man is corrupt and defiles everything which issues from him, is capable of clear and abundant demonstration. First, the human creature sins from earliest years—the first acts which evidence reason has sin also mingled with it. Take any child and observe him closely, and it will be found that as soon as the first dawns of reason appear they are corrupt. They express reason only in sinning—as in rebellion when thwarted, readiness to please themselves, by doing harm to others, excusing themselves by lying, pride of apparel.

“To speak my mind freely, I do confess it is my opinion that children come polluted with sin into the world, and that oftentimes the sins of their youth—especially while they are very young—are rather by virtue of indwelling sin than by examples that are set before them by others—not but what they learn to sin by example, too, but example is not the root but rather the temptation to wickedness” (John Bunyan, 1628-1688). How can we believe otherwise when our Lord has expressly affirmed, “For from within, out of the heart of men [and not “from association with degenerates”] proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mar 7:21-23). It is true that evil habits may be acquired through contact with evil-doers, but they are the occasion and not the radical cause of the same.

This pollution of our very nature, this indwelling corruption, holds men in complete bondage to its awful sway, rendering them utterly impotent unto that which is good. In further proof of

this, let us revert again to Romans 7. In his explanation of why he was unable to perform that obedience which God required, the apostle said, “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:21-23). Indwelling sin is here called “a law.” Literally, a “law” is a moral rule which directs and commands, being enforced with rewards and penalties, which impels us subjects to do the things ordered and avoid the things forbidden. Figuratively, the term “law” is used of an inward principle that moves and inclines constantly unto action. As the law of gravity draws all objects to their centre, so sin is an effectual principle and power inclining unto actions according to its own evil nature.

When the apostle says, “I see another law in my members” (that is, in addition to the principle of grace and holiness communicated at the new birth), he refers to the presence and being of indwelling sin. When he adds “bringing me into captivity,” he signifies its power and efficacy. Indwelling sin is a “law” even in believers, though not to them. Paul said, “I find, then, a law of sin.” It was a discovery which he had made as a regenerate man. From painful experience he found there was that in him which hindered his communion with God, which thwarted his deepest longings to live a sinless life. The operations of divine grace preserve in believers a constant and ordinarily prevailing will to do good, notwithstanding the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary. But the will in unbelievers is completely under the power of sin—their will of sinning is never taken away. Education, religion, and convictions of conscience may restrain unbelievers, but they have no spiritual inclinations of will to do that which is pleasing unto God.

That the very nature of man is corrupt, and defiles everything which issues from him, is apparent not only by his sinning from earliest youth, but second, from the fact that all men sin constantly—not only are their first acts such, but all their subsequent actions are such. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5)—nor has man improved the slightest since then. It is not that everything done by the natural man is in its own nature sinful, but that as they are of a sinner they cannot be anything else than sinful. The thing itself may be the performance of duty, yet if there be no respect unto the commandment of God therein, then it is sinful. To provide food and raiment is a duty, yet because this duty is done from no spiritual motives (out of subjection to God’s authority or the desire to please Him) or end (that God may be glorified thereby) it is sinful. “The plowing of the wicked, is sin” (Pro 21:4). Yet plowing is a duty in itself, nevertheless, it is sinful as the action of a sinner.

Third, it is not thus with a few, but with every member of Adam’s fallen race, which again demonstrates that it is from the very nature of man all evil proceeds. “All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen 6:12). “There is none righteous, no, not one...they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good” (Rom 3:10, 12). Finally, all members of the human race sin thus of their own accord. “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). A child does not have to be taught to sin, he has only to be left to himself and he will soon bring his mother to shame. Things which are not natural have to be taught us and diligently practiced before we learn them. Throw a child into the water, and it is helpless, throw an animal therein, and it will at once begin to swim—its nature teaches him to do so. “Train up a child in the way he should go” (Pro 22:6) and much diligence and patience is required in those who would thus train him. But no instructors are needed to inform the child of the way in which he should not go—his depraved nature urges him into forbidden paths, yea, makes him delight therein.

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD

It is scarcely surprising that far less has been written upon the justice of God than upon some of the other divine perfections. We are accustomed to turn our thoughts unto those objects and subjects which afford us the most pleasure and to avoid those which render us uneasy. But no servant of the Lord should be guilty of pandering to this tendency. Rather must he endeavour with all his might to declare “all the counsel of God” (Act 20:27) and to portray the divine character just as it is set forth in Holy Writ. He must not conceal a single feature thereof, no matter how awe-inspiring it is or how repellent to the fallen creature. It is impossible for us to entertain right conceptions of God unless we have before us a full-orbed sight of His varied excellencies. To view Him only as “love”—to refuse to contemplate Him as “light”—will necessarily result in our manufacturing a false God in our imaginations, a caricature of the true and living God.

God is a Being possessed of every excellence. Not one of them could be lacking without changing His character, and therefore if any one of them is either unintentionally or deliberately omitted, then the object of contemplation is not the true God, but a figment which is the outcome of our misconception. Yet while we are required to acknowledge all the divine attributes, nevertheless, they do not all produce the same effect in our heart and mind. Some are objects of pleasure, but others fill us with awe and fear. Divine wisdom delights us with the wonders of its production and the marvels of its contrivance. Divine goodness charms us with the richness and variety of its gifts. As we contemplate God as a gracious Benefactor, joy is awakened within us, and as we perceive Him ministering to our numerous needs, we are filled with gratitude. But when we turn our thoughts unto the immaculate holiness of the divine nature and the inflexible justice of His moral government, a different order of sentiments is evoked.

When the human mind is focused upon the ineffable purity of God and His unchanging righteousness, it appears to fallen creatures that He no longer smiles, but frowns upon his works. That easy, peaceable disposition—so pleasing to our hearts, so soothing when we feel the stirrings of conscience—in which we contemplate God while considering His goodness alone, gives place to far sterner aspects, and we are made to tremble when He is also seen as an offended Ruler and Judge. Guilty sinners have no desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with One who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13), and whose wrath is “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). Such a view is terrifying, and they would readily flee to the most distant place if they could escape His awful presence. In the sight of holy angels, justice gives a firmness and consistency to the divine character, but the criminal dreads justice and the divine justice most of all, since it is far more formidable and inexorable than man’s.

But however distasteful divine justice may be to the fallen creature, the interests of truth and not the pleasing of his hearers must be the principal aim of the preacher. If he is regulated by the Scriptures and not by maudlin sentiment, he will be preserved from one-sided and misrepresenting conceptions of deity, and he will not hesitate to declare that God is just, as well as wise, and good—that He is not only the Creator and Preserver of the world but also its Governor. And that as power and wisdom are requisite to the guidance and maintenance of inanimate nature, so justice is equally indispensable for the government of intelligent and moral agents who are the proper subjects of law and will therefore require to be rewarded or punished. As another has rightly pointed out, “To deny God’s justice is to wrest the sceptre from His hand and to expose His government to contempt and insult by proclaiming impunity to its subjects.”

Above we have stated that the divine justice is far more formidable than man's and that because of this it is so much dreaded by the guilty. The justice of God is the justice of One who is both omniscient and omnipotent, so that it is impossible we should conceal from Him our offenses or escape from the execution of His sentence. God is possessed of both infinitely complete knowledge of every detail of our lives and of the most absolute power to enforce His verdicts. Frightful as it is for a guilty creature to contemplate such justice, yet woe be unto the preacher who from the fear of man or from coveting his praise, deliberately softens down the divine justice so as to cause less alarm. Woe be to the preacher who attempts to show God's justice is not so formidable as some harsh and gloomy minds have declared, or that it will not mark our sins with extreme strictness, or not rigidly insist upon its demands, or that when it is displeased it may easily be pacified.

Never was there a greater need for the ministers of the Gospel to proclaim the inflexible justice of God than in the evil days in which our lot has fallen. Not only is God Himself insulted and grossly dishonoured by the perversions of His character which have been so widely promulgated during the last few de-cades, but multitudes of people have been fatally deceived thereby, until a generation has now arisen to whom the deity of Holy Writ is the "unknown God." All around us are those who have so erroneous an idea of the divine clemency that they suppose God is as easy-going as the modern parent and as lax as many of our judges. They suppose that only in the most extreme and exceptional cases (if indeed then) will He punish the crimes of any with everlasting fire. By such ungrounded assumptions do they stifle any occasional convictions of conscience and steel their hearts against any apprehensions of danger which may visit them, persuading themselves that God is so full of mercy His justice is virtually inoperative.

But if the consideration of God's justice fills the unbeliever with dislike and dismay, it is far otherwise with those in Christ. In very early times, Abraham consoled himself with the fact that, "The Judge of all the earth" would assuredly "do right" (Gen 18:25). In his wondrous song Moses declared, "I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deu 32:3-4). David extolled his God as, "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psa 145:17). Most remarkable is that word in Jeremiah where the Lord is designated, "the habitation of justice" (Jer 50:7), so that His people might take hope from and shelter in His righteousness. So, too, His prophets found comfort therein in the dark days of Israel's declension, "The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity" (Zep 3:5). While from Revelation 15:3, we learn that the denizens of heaven exclaim, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psa 89:14). This is perhaps the most helpful passage of all in the casting of light upon the most-important, awe-inspiring, and yet glorious subject we are now seeking to study. The great JEHOVAH is here exhibited to our view under the idea of Sovereign and Judge, being presented to our adoring regard as upon His throne. It is the throne of universal empire and of absolute dominion. From that throne the Lord exercises His authority and executes His laws with omnipotent but impartial hand. Justice and judgment are magnified as being the "habitation" or "foundation" (as the Hebrew word is also rendered) of JEHOVAH's throne. There seems to be an allusion unto the bases or supports of an ancient monarch's throne, as we are told the throne of Solomon had "stays on each side of the sitting place" (2Ch 9:18).

Let us first consider, briefly, the nature of God's justice. In seeking to arrive at a true conception thereof, we need to be very much on our guard against carnalizing the same,

degrading the divine majesty by drawing analogies from that which appertains to the human realm. In human affairs, justice is simply the giving to everyone his due, but such a rule cannot possibly be applied to the Most High, for the simple reason that He owes His creatures nothing. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon in this day of fleshly arrogance and spiritual ignorance that there is a vast difference between God's government over His rational creatures and that of an earthly prince over his subjects, and that consequently our notion of justice with regard to the latter cannot be lawfully applied to the former. It is failure at this very point which has resulted in the most wild and irreverent postulates in connection with the justice of God, whereby He has been brought down to the level of His creatures.

A secular ruler is set up for the good of his subjects, this being the principal end of his constitution. The people are not formed for him, but he for them, therefore the administration of justice is a common and public right, whereby he is entrusted with the supreme rule for them. The bare statement of this obvious fact is at once sufficient to show the infinite distance which separates between the King of kings and His administration and any secular ruler and his government. God exists not for the well-being of His creatures, but is independent and self sufficient—for His pleasure they are and were created (Rev 4:11). Consequently He owes them nothing, nor can they profit Him anything. Therefore it necessarily follows that He could not be said to wrong His creatures had it so pleased Him to ordain an economy in which no provision was made for the infliction of punishment upon offenders according to their demerits—that was something which must be determined solely by His own sovereign pleasure.

Absolutely considered, God's justice is the universal rectitude of His nature, for antecedent to all the acts of His will respecting the government of His creatures the glorious and incomprehensible God was essentially and intrinsically righteous in Himself. Divine justice may also be considered relatively, that is, with regard to its exercise in the superintendence and government of rational creatures. It is with the latter the Scriptures are chiefly concerned, that is, with how God acts under the economy which He has instituted. Yet here and there the Sacred Pages give us a glimpse of what God was in Himself prior to His work of creation and taking upon Himself the office of Ruler and Judge. Those glimpses enable us to gain some idea of what deity is in Himself, considered apart from all His works and workings. Here, too, yea, here particularly, we need to be doubly on our guard lest we be guilty of "limiting the Holy One" by circumscribing His actions beyond that which Holy Writ warrants.

It is one thing to say that God cannot act contrary to His own perfections, it is quite another to affirm that God must needs exercise those perfections. We need to use the greatest possible caution in saying what God cannot do. God cannot give His glory to another (Isa 42:8), for to do so would be to admit a rival. God cannot look with approbation upon evil (Hab 1:13), for to do so would sully His holiness. God cannot deny Himself (2Ti 2:13), for then He would be unfaithful. God cannot lie (Ti 1:2), for He is without variableness or shadow of turning. But to declare that His justice obliges God to inflict punishment on sinners and that He cannot pardon without an atonement, is to daringly assert that which Scripture nowhere teaches. That He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7) warrants no man in saying that He "can by no means clear the guilty."

It should be pointed out that a thing may be just in a twofold sense—negatively, as that which justice does not disapprove of, and positively, as that which justice does require. And it is a question of vast importance if we are to have right conceptions of the absolute independence of God—to consider whether His will to punish sinners antecedently to His purpose to introduce the economy in which such now obtains—was just in the former sense only or also in the latter. Whose rights had God violated had He willed otherwise than He did? Certainly not the creature's,

for He owed them nothing. Nor His own, had He been pleased to forego them. God rules now according to the constitution which He has made, yet none can show—for Scripture contains not the slightest hint thereon—that this constitution was the necessary effect and was obliged by His justice.

God was pleased to place His creatures under law—law which was accompanied and enforced by sanctions, promising the reward of life to the obedient and denouncing the penalty of death upon the disobedient—and as the Administrator of that law He is morally obligated to execute its terms. But to insist that a regime wherein sin must be punished or that He was limited to the appointing of a Substitute unto death if the guilty were to go free, strikes this writer as little (if any) short of blasphemy. Against this it has often been objected that the words of the Redeemer, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mat 26:39), prove that there was no other way in which His people could be saved except by His drinking that cup. We answer, the reason why it was impossible that the Saviour should be spared that awful cup was not because the hands of Omniscience were fettered, but because the veracity of God must fulfill His own declarations to that very end.

It would be just as unwarrantable and wrong for us to say that the great God could not create this world any other way than He has. Or that His nature obligated Him to make it just as He did, is to insist that no alternative was left Him than to place it under the system of government which He has instituted, wherein virtue is rewarded, sin is punished, His grace illustriously displayed, His holiness and justice magnified by means of the satisfaction rendered to Him by His incarnate Son. God’s wisdom is no more limited than is His power, and to argue that any one of the divine perfections—be it holiness or justice—placed a restriction upon the contrivances of God’s wisdom is presumption of the worst kind. The divine omniscience is as truly regulated by God’s sovereign will as is His omnipotence. All we are justified in saying is that the economy which God has appointed is the one which He deemed best and most glorifying unto Himself.

Under the economy which God instituted He has determined the manner and the extent in which His perfections shall be exercised and displayed. For example, He has determined the several offices which each person in the God-head shall respectively hold, and this He did freely of His own sovereign pleasure. He has determined the number of creatures He shall bring into existence, the length of their earthly life, and what shall be their eternal destiny, and in this, too, He acted without any restraint. He determined to give us a written revelation from Himself, concerning which He alone decided how much or how little of His everlasting counsels should be revealed and in which He has made certain promises that He has pledged Himself to fulfill. Certainly He was under no obligation to make any promises at all, but having made them His veracity and His faithfulness require Him to make them good. Thus, the only limitations which the Almighty has placed upon Himself in His dealings with His creatures are those which His own imperial will saw meet to impose.

Now under the constitution or economy which it has pleased God to institute in the superintendence or government of His rational creatures, His justice is known among men by different names according to the different objects which it is immediately conversant. Does the Most High, for instance, enact laws for His creatures? then His moral rectitude appears in these laws as equity. They are not cruel, but “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12), framed for our well-being. How thankful we should be for such a law. Has God condescended to express Himself in promises? then His rectitude therein is seen as fidelity, for He is immutably faithful in making good every one of them. Has He denounced punishment upon all disobedience? then in the execution of His threats, God’s rectitude appears in His absolute veracity. Does He administer

those laws both with respect to reward and punishment, with strict impartiality, so that He is no respecter of persons? then His rectitude appears as glorious righteousness.

It will thus be seen that His absolute justice expresses what God is in Himself, the moral rectitude of His nature, whereas His relative justice considers Him as standing in relation to His creatures. The one pertains to Him in His private character, the other in His public. It is in His assumption and discharge of His office of Ruler and Judge the latter is exercised. As the Sovereign of the universe He maintains the rights of His throne and order among His subjects. Because of the moral rectitude of His nature, when He enacts laws they are equitable, when He makes declarations they are true, when He expresses Himself in promises they are faithful, and when He declares threats against disobedience they are righteous and inexorable. As the “habitation of justice” God is to be revered. As the King of kings He is to be submitted unto. He cannot be injured by us, nor does He suffer by our disobedience, but He will assuredly avenge it and vindicate His name.

## COVENANT MERCY

Mercy is that perfection in JEHOVAH which disposes Him to save miserable sinners—not a blind mercy such as infidels dream of, but consistent with the honour of His law and exercised to the glory of its holy precepts and just sanctions. Therefore mercy and truth are so often mentioned together in Scripture. God will not show any mercy to sinners but such as tends to establish His truth. Not one of His words can be broken, nor can one tittle of them ever fail. He will be justified in all His sayings and clear when He is judged. He will be true and just whenever He is merciful. His mercies being all covenant mercies, and all given in and through Christ Jesus. All men are by nature children of wrath, and only they who are chosen and called in Christ Jesus are saved from wrath. These are vessels of mercy. His mercy is to them the love of a tender parent to His miserable children. He pities them and determines to save them from their sins. In due time He quickens them, gives them eyes to see and hearts to believe in Christ as the apostle witnesses, “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph 2:4-5).

But for what reason and upon what account is He merciful to them? His mercy has no motive but His own will. The objects of His mercy are corrupt fallen creatures, deserving His wrath even as others, and therefore He does not deal with them upon the footing of desert. If He showed them mercy for any foreseen works of their own, because He knew they would repent and believe the Gospel, and walk worthy of it, mercy would then be turned into justice, and would lose both its name and nature. Whereas He says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” It is from Mine own freedom and sovereignty that I have mercy on any sinners. The cause is in Myself and not in them. I have compassion on whom I will. It is from Mine own love that I have determined to be gracious to them. And My love has determined to save them and the way also in which I will save them. I have appointed the end and the means at the same time. Of Mine own motion and good-will I have resolved to give My Son for them and My Spirit to them, that they may repent and believe the Gospel and walk worthy of it. And so I may bring them through My tender mercies to eternal

salvation. If this were not the case, how could the description be true that mercy is “from everlasting to everlasting”?

The mercy of God knows no variableness or shadow of turning. It is always the same. His Fatherly heart ever entertained thoughts of mercy towards them, for when He shows them mercy it is said to be “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:11)—not for their merits but for His mercies’ sake—not for what they may claim to be, but for His own name’s sake. He gives all from mercy, and He would have all the glory returned to the mercy of the Giver. What He gives, that He continues, and according to covenant engagements. Covenant mercies are certain mercies, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3). They have already been made sure to Him. He is now in full possession of every promised mercy. And He has received them not as a private person, but as the Head of the body, the church. He keeps them for the use of His church members. And as sure as the crown is upon His head, so surely will it be upon every one of their heads, for they are in the same covenant with Him, whose sure mercies reach from eternity to eternity.

Oh what a view is here opened to the eye of faith! Mercy always purposing, and in due time bestowing its free blessings upon sinners—mercy without beginning and without ending. The Holy Spirit often calls upon us to behold it in this life, for He has not celebrated any of the divine properties so much as this. It is frequently the noble subject of thanksgiving in the psalmist’s hymns. He has dedicated the 136th entirely to the praise of mercy. And going through the works of nature, providence, and grace, He ascribes them, one by one, to that mercy which endures forever. Oh happy, thrice happy objects of it! What was in the heart of the Father of mercies towards you from everlasting will be so to everlasting. His sure mercies are yours. His compassions toward you fail not. Whatever you want for your successful walk, He has promised to give you. Be not discouraged then—He will supply all your wants, not for your sakes, but for His mercies’ sake. Are you sensible of your unworthiness? That is well, mercy is for such. It can have no glory but from such as you. Trust it, and be assured you will find that it “endures for ever.”

If a doubt should arise in your mind—it is true, mercy in God cannot fail, but the exercise of it towards me may fail. I may so walk as to deprive myself of all claim and title to it. The psalmist has given a direct answer to this ill-grounded suspicion. He says, “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him” (Psa 103:17). “Unto them that fear him.” This is their character—they fear their God. Once there was no fear of God before their eyes, but now they know Him to be their Father. The Spirit of adoption has given them joy and peace in believing it. Hence a holy, filial fear rules in their hearts and influences their walk. While it operates thus, and as obedient children, they fear to offend their loving Father, and desire to please Him in all things. What ground have they to suspect that His mercy toward them should fail?

But if they cease to fear Him, then will He cease to be merciful to them? No, blessed be God. He has made ample provision in this case. “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:40). This fear is one of the fruits of the Spirit, which He produces in all the children of God, and they have it from Him as a covenant blessing, which is full security for its continuance. It is one of the graces provided for them in the Saviour by the Father’s immutable love. “I will,” says He, “give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever” (Jer 32:39). The Holy Spirit is the Guardian of this never-failing fear. It is His office to put it and then to keep it in their hearts. He has the whole charge of it, and therefore He has promised to abide

with them forever, that they may fear the Lord all the days of their lives.—William Romaine, 1770.

(We need scarcely point out that though God bestows inferior and temporal mercies on all His creatures, yet His best and eternal favours are restricted to His elect).



# October

## **THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL**

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Gladly would we tarry and seek to extract from this remarkable verse something of its inexpressible sweetness, that we may be more firmly established in the faith and that our souls may be nourished thereby. But as God’s people of old were required to eat the paschal lamb with “bitter herbs” (Exo 12:8), so we are called upon to take to heart the fearful price which had to be paid for our salvation. “The redemption of their soul is precious” or “costly” (Psa 49:8)—so infinitely costly that the Holy One was “made sin” for us. This was a divine transaction, a profoundly mysterious one, yet one which is presented for faith to receive. It lies at the very core of the Gospel, and our peace depends very largely upon a right understanding thereof.

It is only by diligently comparing passage with passage and allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture that we shall be preserved from serious error at this vital point. First, then, we turn to the great type of this unique transaction. On the annual day of atonement, we are told that, “Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited” (Lev 16:21-22). Thus there was in figure an actual transference of all the iniquities of God’s people unto the head of the victim. In like manner, we are informed, “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” (Isa 53:6), and therefore does the apostle declare of Christ, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24).

To say that Christ’s being “made sin for us” means that God appointed Him to be a sin offering in our stead, does not go back far enough. Nothing could be offered as an expiatory sacrifice unless and until sin had been imputed to it—note the laying of the offerer’s hands upon the head of the animal before slaying it in Leviticus 1:4-5 and 4:4. Christ not only endured the full penalty which our sins deserved, but the very guilt and breach of the law was charged to Him. How definitely our sins were made (legally constituted) His, appears from His actually confessing them as His own, “For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me” (Psa 40:12). He owned—see verses 7 and 8 for the identification of the speaker. So again He declared, “O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee” (Psa 69:5)

To say that Christ’s being “made sin” signifies that He was paid its wages or caused to suffer the penalty of His people’s transgressions is also an inadequate and faulty definition, for it

confounds an effect with its cause. Christ could not have been punished for sin unless He had stood guilty in the sight of the law—punishment always supposes guilt, personal or imputed. Christ was culpable in the eyes of the law because He took the place of and acted as the Sponsor for His sinful people—the awful load of the accumulated guilt of all their iniquities being laid upon Him. The Lord Jesus was “made sin for us”—that is, in our place, for the idea of substitution is necessarily involved in the very nature of this transaction. The spotless victim occupied the room of the foul violators of the law, and therefore He must die. Because He was “made sin” He was also “made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13)—the latter being the consequence of the former.

But though legally identified with us, the Sponsor and Surety must not be personally confounded with ourselves. Whether we regard Christ personally as Immanuel or officially as Substitute, He always occupied a place which pertained to Him alone. The fact of His bearing His people’s sins never brought Him down morally to their personal condition. When the fearful guilt of our transgressions lay upon Him, His own personal place of holy separateness (Heb 7:6) was still retained by Him, and recognized by God as retained by Him. Heaven was opened at the cross, and if on the one hand, wrath burning as fire descended on the sacred person of our Substitute, on the other hand, it must be remembered that from the cross there returned to heaven, ascending like a cloud, acceptable fragrance which filled the sanctuary. Beautifully was this brought out in the types—even the fat of the sin offering was burned upon the altar for “a sweet savour unto the LORD” (Lev 4:31), while “sweet incense” was employed on the day of atonement (Lev 16:12-13).

The utmost care must be used by us when meditating upon this solemn and sacred mystery. Though it pleased God to make the Sinless One to be sin for us, yet so far from the glory of Christ being tarnished thereby, it was enhanced. Though bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, nevertheless it was the Holy One who bore them—His personal purity unsullied, His immaculate nature uncontaminated. This is made manifest in another, one of the most beautiful of all the types, namely, the veil. The veil, which in the tabernacle separated the holy place from the holiest of all, was the appointed emblem of our Saviour’s humanity—of “his flesh” (Heb 10:20). It was prominently associated with His death, for it was then rent by God “from the top to the bottom” (Mat 27:51). How blessed, then, to see that the very basis of that veil was pure white linen, and that on that basis was displayed (by Christ in life and death alike) the heavenly “blue” as well as the purple and scarlet (Exo 26:31).

It remains for us now to add a brief word upon the merits of Christ. Not only was the Lord Jesus, negatively, exempt from the taint of original sin and free from all personal transgression, but He was perfectly conformed to the whole will of God both in heart and life, rendering complete and perpetual obedience to His law in thought, word, and deed. And that God-glorifying obedience of His was entitled to reward. Now that perfect obedience which Christ rendered unto the law was a vicarious one, being performed in the place and on behalf of His people. Consequently, as death became the portion of the Substitute, eternal life becomes the certain portion of all whom He represented. Christ was made sin for us that we might be made “the righteousness of God in him.”

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### *15. Fasting—Matthew 6:16-19*

Our present passage brings before us still another subject upon which multitudes of professing Christians are in much need of instruction. Personally we have never heard a sermon or “Bible reading” on Fasting, and very little has come to our notice thereon which was written during the last forty years—and most of that “little” left very much to be desired. From conversations and communications with others, it appears that our experience has been by no means a singular one, and therefore we do not feel it necessary to apologize for devoting two articles to the above verses. Following our usual custom, we will first deal with our passage generally and topically, comparing with it the teaching of other sections of Scripture on this theme, and then consider our verses more specifically, seeking to expound and apply their terms.

Four hundred years ago, Calvin (John, 1509-1564) wrote in his “Institutes,” “Let me say something on fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as altogether superfluous. While on the other hand, where the use of it is not well-understood, it easily degenerates into superstition.” Upon this matter the passing of the centuries has produced little or no improvement, for the very conditions which confronted this eminent Reformer prevail extensively today. If on the one side, Romanists have perverted a means unto an end, and have exalted what is exceptional to a principal part of their religious worship, Protestants have gone to an opposite extreme, allowing what was practiced by primitive Christians to sink into general disuse.

Though there may have been much formality and hypocrisy in some who attended to this religious duty, yet that is no reason why the practice itself should be discountenanced and discontinued. Nowhere in our Lord’s teaching is there anything to discourage religious fasting, but not a little to the contrary. Most certainly He was not reprehending this practice in the passage before us, rather was He uttering a caution against hypocrisy therein. By saying, “When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites,” He takes it for granted that His disciples will fast—as much so as He assumes by His, “When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites” (Mat 6:5) that they would be men of prayer. Christ was here engaged in condemning the wicked perversion of the Pharisees, from which He also took occasion to give us valuable instruction upon our present theme.

When the heart and mind are deeply exercised upon a serious subject, especially one of a solemn or sorrowful kind, there is a disinclination for the partaking of food, and abstinence therefrom is a natural expression of our unworthiness, of our sense of the comparative worthlessness of earthly things, and of our desire to fix our attention upon things above. Fasting, either total or partial, seems to have been connected with seasons of peculiarly solemn devotion in all ages. When Jonah testified to a guilty city, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (i.e., if it does not repent and turn to God) we are told, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed...Let neither man nor beast...feed, nor drink water...and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way....who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” (Jon 3:5-9).

There are a number of features about the above incident which are to be carefully noted, for they throw not a little light on several aspects of our present subject. This was no ordinary occasion when the Ninevites fasted, but a time of exceptional gravity, when the black clouds of divine judgment hung heavy over their heads. It was not a fast undertaken by the individual, but one into which the whole populace entered. It was designed to express their deep humiliation before God and was an appendage unto their crying “mightily” to Him. It was not a duty performed in response to any express commandment from the Lord, but was entered into voluntarily and spontaneously. Its object was to divert the fierce anger of heaven against them, and as the closing verse of Jonah 3 tells us, “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said [provisionally] that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”

Our first main division, then, shall be occasions of fasting. Let us preface our remarks thereon by pointing out that what we are about to consider particularly is extraordinary fasting in contradistinction from ordinary. As we shall yet see, Scripture mentions partial fasting as well as total abstinence from food. There is an ordinary fasting which is required from all men, especially from the saints, namely, an avoidance of gluttony and surfeiting, a making a “god” of our belly (Phi 3:19). This ordinary fasting consists in temperance and sobriety, whereby the appetites are restrained from the use of food and drink which exceeds moderation. We are to be temperate in all things, and at all times. Rightly did the godly Payson (Edward, 1783-1827) point out, “Fasting is not so much by total abstinence from food beyond accustomed intervals, as by denying self at every meal, and using a spare and simple diet at all times—a course well-adapted to preserve the mind and body in the best condition for study and devotional exercises.”

Now the occasion of an extraordinary religious fast is when a weighty cause thereof is offered. This is when some judgment of God hangs over our heads, such as the sword, famine, or pestilence. In circumstances of grave danger, the pious kings and prophets of Israel called on the people to engage in fasting as well as prayer. As examples of this we may cite the following. When the hand of the Lord lay heavily upon Israel and thousands fell in battle before the Benjamites, “Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings” (Jdg 20:26). When the Moabites, Ammonites, and others combined against Jehoshaphat in battle, we are told that he “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD” (2Ch 20:3-4). In a time of national calamity, Joel cried, “Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly...and cry unto the LORD” (Joe 1:14).

The second general cause and occasion for fasting is when God is earnestly sought for some special and particular blessing, or the supply of some great need. Thus on the annual day of atonement, when remission was sought for the sins of the nation, the Israelites were most expressly forbidden to do any manner of work, but instead to “afflict their souls” (Lev 23:29-32). So, too, upon the exodus of the Jews from Babylon, Ezra tells us, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance” (Ezr 8:21).

In addition to these examples of public fasting, Scripture also mentions that of many pious individuals. When his child by the wife of Uriah was smitten with sore sickness, we are told that, “David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth” (2Sa 12:16). On another occasion, when sorely beset by enemies, David declared, “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting”

(Psa 35:13). When Nehemiah was informed that the remnant of his people left of the captivity in the provinces were “in great affliction and reproach” and the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burned with fire, he “sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4). When Daniel ardently desired the deliverance of the children of Israel from their captivity in Babylon he, Set his face “unto the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan 9:3).

It is a great mistake to suppose that either public or private fasting on the part of the pious was a practice confined to the Old Testament era. Of Anna we read, She “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luk 2:37). When devout Cornelius ardently desired more light from God concerning the Messiah, he fasted and prayed (Act 10:30). When the church at Antioch sought God’s special blessing upon and success of His servants in the Gospel, they “fasted” (Act 13:3). In like manner when Paul and Silas were about to establish local churches, they “prayed with fasting” (Act 14:23), because in a matter of such importance they looked for special directions from God. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, the apostle gives plain intimation that it was the ordinary and proper custom of Christians to give themselves to “prayer and fasting” when special needs called for the same.

Next, we will consider the manner of fasting. Fasting consists in all abstinence from meat and drink, yet not such an abstinence as would impair health or injure the body—which is forbidden in Colossians 2:23, and would clash with Christ’s directions that we should pray for our “daily bread.” It is the abstinence from such meals as would interfere with an uninterrupted and earnest waiting upon God. Such fasting would primarily be a denying ourselves of all dainties, as Daniel “ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into his mouth, neither did he anoint himself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled” (see Dan 10:3). Coupled with the most sparse possible diet, there must also be an abstaining from all the delights of nature (see Joel 2:15-16). All of this is designed for the afflicting of ourselves, as Paul in his, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27).

Ere proceeding further it should be pointed out that there may be a prolonged abstinence from food and yet no fasting in the Scriptural sense of the term. One may observe a weekly fast, and observe it strictly, and yet not fast at all, if there is no expression of an evangelical sorrow of the soul. The mere abstinence from food is not fasting, any more than the mere moving of the lips is prayer. And certainly there is nothing whatever of it in the denying one’s self meats while yet the hunger is appeased with eggs and fish. Unless our fasting is that which marks such a heartfelt sense of sin and of seeking unto God as will brook no diversion from its purpose, moving us spontaneously and for the time being with a lack of appetite for all things else, then it is but a superstition, a piece of morbid formalism.

God is not to be imposed upon by any mere outward performance, no matter how solemnly and decorously it be executed. It is at the heart He ever looks, and unless our hearts be in our fasting we do but mock the Most High with an empty show. Of old He asked Israel, “When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” (Zec 7:5). On another occasion, He refused to accept the fasting of the people because they were flagrantly setting at naught the precepts of the second table, saying, “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free?” (Isa 58:5-6). And at a

later date, the Lord gave orders, “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God” (Joe 2:13).

From the very nature of the case, we should never let our minds dwell on the act of fasting, as though we had therein discharged a duty. Fasting is not to be undertaken for the mere sake of fasting. It is not as the doing of penance that we are ever to abstain from food, neither is it as though the abstaining were a process of holiness. Still less must we regard it as in anyway a meritorious performance. Private fasting must issue from an urge within and not because it is imposed from without. Private fasting should be spontaneous, the result of our being under a great stress of spirit, and the simple act itself be entirely lost sight of in the engrossing fervor which prompted it. There had been little or no practical difficulties on the subject of fasting if these simple rules had been understood and observed.

And yet, so prone are we to run to extremes, a word of caution is needed here lest what has just been said above be put to an evil use. It would be quite wrong to draw the conclusion, seeing I feel no inward urge to engage in fasting, therefore I am discharged from this duty. The Christian reader should at once perceive that such an argument would be quite invalid in connection with other spiritual duties. If I feel no appetite for the heavenly manna or no desire to draw near unto the throne of grace, then it is my bounden duty to penitently confess unto God my coldness of heart and beg Him to stir me up afresh unto a hearty use of the appointed means. The same principle most certainly holds good in connection with fasting.

The particular seasons for fasting are to be determined mainly by the governmental dealings of God, and therefore those who would improve such seasons must be strict observers of the workings of Providence—otherwise God may be calling aloud for weeping and girding of sackcloth, while we hear not His call but indulge in joy and feasting (Isa 22:12-13). As to the amount of time to be spent in either individual or corporate fasting, the duty—the exigencies of the situation—should regulate it and not it the duty. Various lengths of time are mentioned in different cases, see 2 Samuel 12:16; Esther 4:16; Daniel 10:2-3. “Wherefore I judge that none are to be solicitous as to what quantity of time, more or less, they spend in these exercises, so that the work of the time be done. Nay, I very much doubt men lay a snare to themselves in tying themselves to a certain quantity of time in such cases” (Thomas Boston, 1676-1732).

Let us now consider the purpose of fasting. Various designs are mentioned in Scripture. The first end in fasting is the denying of self, the bringing of our body and its lusts in subjection unto the will and Word of God. Said the psalmist, “I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach” (Psa 69:10)—before men, yes—but not so before God. Our Lord warned us, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness” (Luk 21:34). The body is made heavy, its senses dulled, and the mind rendered sluggish by much eating or drinking, and thereby the whole man becomes unfit for the duties of prayer and hearing of the Word. In order that this unfitness may be avoided and that the lusts of the flesh may be mortified and subdued, fasting is to be duly engaged in.

The second end of fasting is to stir up our devotions and to confirm our minds in the duties of hearing and prayer. In this connection, it is to be duly noted that fasting and prayer are almost always linked together in the Scriptures, or it would be more correct to say “prayer and fasting” (Mat 17:21; Mar 9:29, and Act 14:23)—to intimate the latter is designed as an aid to the former, chiefly in that the non-preparation and participation of meals leaves us the freer for uninterrupted communion with God. When the stomach is full, the body and mind are less qualified for the performance of spiritual duties. For this reason we are told Anna “served God with fastings and

prayers” (Luk 2:37), the design of the Holy Spirit being to commend her to our notice for the fervency of her spirit, which she evidenced in this manner.

The third end in fasting is to bear witness unto the humiliation and contrition of our hearts, for the denying ourselves of nature’s comforts suitably expresses the inward sorrow and grief we feel over our sins. “Proclaim a fast” is the Lord’s requirement (see Joe 1:14) when He would have His people testify their contrition. Surely it is obvious that the participation of creature dainties or the indulgence of self in similar ways is most incongruous at a time when we are mourning before God and declaring our repentance. When convicted of our iniquities, God requires us to turn unto Him with fasting and mourning, and with the rending of our hearts.

The fourth end of fasting is to admonish us of our guilt and uncleanness—to put us in mind of our utter unworthiness of even the common mercies of Providence—that we deserve not food or drink. It is designed to make us conscious of our wants and miseries, and thereby make us the more aware of our sins. If the Ninevites were made to perceive the propriety of abstaining from food and drink when the sword of divine judgment was hanging over their heads, then how much more should we, with our vastly greater light and privileges, be sensible of the same. If we duly “consider our ways” (see Hag 1:5), must we not feel that sackcloth and ashes well become us? The main peril to guard against in our fasting will be considered next month.

## **THE LIFE OF ELIJAH**

### *10. At Zarephath*

“Change and decay in all around I see.” We live in a mutable world where nothing is stable and where life is full of strange vicissitudes. We cannot, and we should not, expect things to go smoothly for us for any length of time while we are sojourning in this land of sin and mortality. It would be contrary to the present constitution of our lot as fallen creatures for, “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). Neither would it be for our good if we were altogether exempted from affliction. Though we are the children of God, the objects of His special favour—yet this does not free us from the ordinary calamities of life. Sickness and death may enter our dwellings at any time. They may attack us personally, or those who are nearest and dearest to us, and we are obliged to bow to the sovereign dispensations of Him who rules over all. These are commonplace remarks, we know—nevertheless they contain a truth of which, unpalatable though it is, we need constantly reminding.

Though we are quite familiar with the fact mentioned above, and see it illustrated daily on every side, yet we are very reluctant and slow to acknowledge its application to ourselves. Such is human nature—we wish to ignore the unpleasant and persuade ourselves that if our present lot is a happy one it will remain so for some time to come. But no matter how healthy we are, how vigorous our constitution, how well-provided for financially, we must not think that our mountain is so strong it cannot be moved (Psa 30:6-7). Rather must we train ourselves to hold temporal mercies with a light hand, and use the relations and comforts of this life as though we had them not (1Co 7:30), remembering that “the fashion of this world passeth away.” Our rest is not here, and if we build our nest in any earthly tree it should be with the realization that sooner or later the whole forest will be cut down.

Like many a one both before and since, the widow at Zarephath might have been tempted to think that all her troubles were now over. She might reasonably expect a blessing from entertaining the servant of God in her home, and a very real and liberal blessing she received. In consequence of sheltering him, she and her son were supplied by a divine miracle in a time of famine for “many days,” and from this she might draw the conclusion that she had nothing further to fear. Yet the very next thing recorded in our narrative is, “And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him” (1Ki 17:17). The language in which this pathetic incident is couched seems to denote that her son was stricken suddenly, and so sorely that he expired quickly, before there was opportunity for Elijah to pray for his recovery.

How deeply mysterious are the ways of God! The strangeness of this incident now before us is the more evident if we link it with the verse immediately preceding, “The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah. And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman...fell sick” (1Ki 17:16-17) etc. Both she and her son had been miraculously fed for a considerable interval of time, and now he is drastically cut off from the land of the living—reminding us of those words of Christ concerning the sequel to an earlier miracle, “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead” (Joh 6:49). Even though the smile of the Lord is upon us and He is showing Himself strong on our behalf, this does not grant us an immunity from the afflictions to which flesh and blood is the heir. As long as we are left in this vale of tears we must seek grace to “rejoice with trembling” (Psa 2:11).

On the other hand, this widow had most certainly erred if she concluded from the snatching away of her son that she had forfeited the favour of God and that this dark dispensation was a sure mark of His wrath. Is it not written, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6)? Even when we have the clearest manifestations of God’s good will—as this woman had in the presence of Elijah under her roof and the daily miracle of sustenance—we must be prepared for the frowns of Providence. We ought not to be staggered if we meet with sharp afflictions while we are treading the path of duty. Did not Joseph do so again and again? Did not Daniel? Above all, did not the Redeemer Himself?—so, too, with His apostles. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1Pe 4:12).

Let it be duly noted that this poor soul had received particular marks of God’s favour before she was cast into the furnace of affliction. It often happens that God exercises His people with the heaviest trials when they have been the recipients of His richest blessings. Yet here the anointed eye may discern His tender mercies. Does that remark surprise you, dear reader? Do you ask, How so? Why, the Lord, in His infinite grace, often prepares His children for suffering by previously granting them great spiritual enjoyments—giving them unmistakable tokens of His kindness, filling their hearts with His love, and diffusing an indescribable peace over their minds. Having tasted experimentally of the Lord’s goodness, they are better fitted to meet adversity. Moreover, patience, hope, meekness, and the other spiritual graces can only be developed in the fire. The faith of this widow, then, must needs be tried yet more severely.

The loss of her child was a very heavy affliction for this poor woman. It would be so to any mother, but it was more especially severe on her, because she had previously been reduced to widowhood, and there would now be none left to support and comfort her declining years. In him all her affections were centered and with his death all her hopes were destroyed. Her coal was now indeed quenched (2Sa 14:7) for none remained to preserve the name of her husband on the

earth. Nevertheless, as in the case of Lazarus and his sisters, this heavy blow was “for the glory of God” (Joh 11:4) and was to afford her a still more distinguishing mark of the Lord’s favour. Thus it was, too, with Joseph and Daniel, to whom we have alluded above—severe and painful were their trials, yet subsequently God conferred yet greater honour upon them. O for faith to lay hold of the “afterward” of Hebrews 12:11.

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1Ki 17:18). Alas, what poor, failing, sinful creatures we are! How wretchedly we requite God for His abundant mercies! When His chastening hand is laid upon us, how often we rebel instead of meekly submitting thereto. Instead of humbling ourselves beneath God’s mighty hand and begging Him to show “wherefore” He is contending with us (Job 10:2), we are far readier to blame some other person as being the cause of our trouble. Thus it was with this woman. Instead of entreating Elijah to pray with and for her—that God would enable her to understand wherein she had “erred” (Job 6:24), that He would be pleased to sanctify this affliction unto the good of her soul, and enable her to glorify Him “in the fires” (Isa 24:15)—she reproached him. How sadly we fail to use our privileges.

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1Ki 17:18). This is in striking contrast from the calmness she had displayed when Elijah first encountered her. The swift calamity which had befallen her had come as a sore surprise, and under such circumstances when trouble overtakes us unexpectedly it is hard to keep our spirits composed. Under sudden and severe trials much grace is needed if we are to be preserved from impatience, petulant outbursts, and to exercise unshaken confidence in and complete submission to God. Not all of the saints are enabled to say with Job, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?...the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 2:10; 1:21). But so far from such failure excusing us, we must judge ourselves unsparingly and contritely confess such sins unto God.

The poor widow was deeply distressed over her loss, and her language to Elijah is a strange mixture of faith and unbelief, pride and humility. It was the inconsistent outburst of an agitated mind, as the disconnected and jerky nature of it intimates. First, she asks him, “What have I to do with thee?” (1Ki 17:18)—what have I done to displease thee? wherein have I injured thee? She wished that she had never set eyes on him if he were responsible for the death of her child. Yet, second, she owns him as “thou man of God”—one who was separated unto the divine service. She must have known by this time that the terrible drought had come upon Israel in answer to the prophet’s prayers, and she probably concluded her own affliction had come in a similar way. Third, she humbled herself, saying “Art thou come to me to call my sin to remembrance?” (1Ki 17:18)—possibly a reference to her former worship of Baal.

It is often God’s way to employ afflictions in bringing former sins to our remembrance. In the ordinary routine of life it is so easy to go on from day to day without any deep exercise of conscience before the Lord, especially so when we are in the enjoyment of a replenished barrel. It is only as we are really walking closely with Him, or when we are smitten with some special chastisement of His hand that our conscience is sensitive before Him. And when death entered her family the question of sin came up, for death is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). It is always the safest attitude for us to assume when we regard our losses as the voice of God speaking to our sinful hearts, and to diligently examine ourselves, repent of our iniquities, and duly confess them unto the Lord, that we may obtain His forgiveness and cleansing (1Jo 1:9).

It is at this very point that the difference between an unbeliever and a believer so often appears. When the former is visited with some sore trouble or loss, the pride and self-righteousness of his heart is quickly manifested by his, “I know not what I have done to deserve this. I always sought to do what is right. I am no worse than my neighbours who are spared such sorrow—why should I be made the subject of such a calamity?” But how different is it with a person truly humbled. He is distrustful of himself, aware of his many shortcomings, and ready to fear that he has displeased the Lord. Such a one will diligently consider his ways (Hag 1:5), reviewing his former manner of life and carefully scrutinizing his present behaviour, so as to discover what has been or still is amiss, that it may be set right. Only thus can the fears of our mind be relieved and the peace of God confirmed in our souls.

It is this calling to mind our manifold sins and judging ourselves for them which will make us meek and submissive, patient and resigned. It was thus with Aaron who, when the judgment of God fell so heavily upon his family, “held his peace” (Lev 10:3). It was thus with poor old Eli who had failed to admonish and discipline his sons, for when they were summarily slain, he exclaimed, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good” (1Sa 3:18). The loss of a child may sometimes remind parents of sins committed with respect to it long previously. So it was with David when he lost his child by the hand of God smiting it for his wickedness (2Sa 12). No matter how heavy the loss, how deep his grief, when in his right mind the language of the saint will ever be, “I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa 119:75).

Though the widow and her son had been kept alive for many days, miraculously sustained by the power of God, while the rest of the people had suffered, yet she was less impressed by the divine beneficence than by His taking away her child, “What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1Ki 17:18) While she seems to acknowledge God in the death of her son, she cannot shake off the thought that the prophet’s presence was responsible for it. She attributes her loss to Elijah—as though he had been commissioned to go to her for the purpose of inflicting punishment upon her for her sin. As he had been sent to Ahab to denounce the drought upon Israel for their sin, so now she was afraid of his presence, alarmed at the very sight of him. Alas, how ready we are to mistake the grounds of our afflictions and ascribe them to false causes.

“And he said unto her, Give me thy son” (1Ki 17:19). In the opening paragraph of last month’s article, we pointed out how that the second half of 1 Kings 17 presents to us a picture of the domestic life of Elijah, his deportment in the widow’s home at Zarephath. First, he evidenced his contentment with the humble fare, expressing no dissatisfaction with the unvarying menu day after day. And here we behold how he conducted himself under great provocation. The petulant outburst of this agitated woman was a cruel one to make unto the very man who had brought deliverance to her house. Her “art thou come to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?” (1Ki 17:18) was uncalled for and unjust, and might well have prompted a bitter reply. It had undoubtedly done so had not the subduing grace of God been working within him, for Elijah was naturally of a very warm temper.

The wrong construction which the widow placed upon Elijah’s presence in her home was enough to shake any person. Blessed is it to observe there was no angry reply made to her inconsiderate judgment, but instead a “soft answer” to turn away her wrath. If one speaks to us unadvisedly with their lips that is no reason why we should descend to their level. The prophet took no notice of her passionate inquiry and thereby evidenced that he was a follower of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart” (Mat 11:29), of whom we read, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled

not again” (1Pe 2:23). “Elijah saw that she was in extreme distress and that she spoke as one in great anguish of spirit, and therefore, taking no notice of her words, he calmly said to her, ‘Give me thy son,’ leading her at the same time to expect the restoration of her child through his intercession” (John Simpson, 1798-1870).

It may be thought that the last words cited above are entirely speculative. Personally we believe that they are fully warranted by Scripture. In Hebrews 11:35, we read, “Women received their dead raised to life again.” It will be remembered that this statement is found in the great faith chapter, where the Spirit has set forth some of the wondrous achievements and exploits of those who trust the living God. One individual case after another is mentioned, and then there is it grouping together and generalizing, “who through faith subdued kingdoms” (Heb 11:33), etc., etc. —“women received their dead raised to life again” (Heb 11:35). There can be no room for doubt that the reference here is to the case now before us and the companion one in that of the Shunammite (2Ki 4:17-37). Here, then, is where the New Testament again throws its light upon the earlier Scriptures, enabling us to obtain a more complete conception of that which we are now considering.

The widow of Zarephath, though a Gentile, was a daughter of Sarah, to whom had been committed the faith of God’s elect. Such a faith is a supernatural one, its Author and Object being supernatural. When this faith was first born within her we are not told—very likely while Elijah was sojourning in her home, for “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”—(Rom 10:17). The supernatural character of her faith was evidenced by its supernatural fruits, for it was in response to her faith (as well as to Elijah’s intercession) that her child was restored to her. What is the more remarkable is that, so far as the Word informs us, there had been no previous case of the dead being brought back again to life. Nevertheless, He who had caused a handful of meal to waste not and a little oil in a cruse to fail not while it sustained three people for “many days,” surely He could also quicken the dead. Thus does faith reason—nothing is impossible to the Almighty.

It may be objected that there is no hint in the historical narrative of the widow’s faith as to the restoring of her son to life, but rather that to the contrary. True, yet this in nowise makes against what has been pointed out above. Nothing is said in Genesis about Sarah’s faith to conceive seed, but instead her skepticism is mentioned. What is there in Exodus to suggest that the parents of Moses were exercising faith in God when they placed their son in the ark of bulrushes?—yet see Hebrews 11:23. One would be hard put to it to find anything in the book of Judges which suggests that Samson was a man of faith, yet it is clear from Hebrews 11:32 that he was. But if nothing is said in the Old Testament of her faith, we may also note that the unkind words of the widow to Elijah are not recorded in the New Testament—any more than the unbelief of Sarah or the impatience of Job—because they are blotted out by the blood of the Lamb.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN’S IMPOTENCY**

### *5. Its Extent*

When seeking to unfold some other great truths of Scripture, by means of contemplating separately their component parts, we had occasion to remind the reader how very difficult it was to avoid some overlapping. The same thing needs to be pointed out here in connection with the

subject we are now considering. A river has many tributaries and a surveyor must necessarily trace out each one separately, yet he does so with the knowledge that they all run out of or run into the same main stream. A tree has many boughs, yet though distinct members of it they often interweave. So it is with our present theme, and as we endeavour to follow out its various branches there is of necessity a certain measure of repetition. Though in one way this is to be regretted, being apt to weary the impatient, yet it has its advantages, for it better fixes in our minds some of the principal features.

Following our introductory remarks, we began by showing the solemn reality of man's spiritual impotency, furnishing clear proofs thereof from Holy Writ. Next, we endeavoured to delineate in detail the precise nature of man's inability—that it is penal, moral, voluntary, and criminal. Last month, we dwelt upon the root of the awful malady, evidencing that it lies in the corruption of our very nature. We are now to consider the extent of the spiritual paralysis which has seized upon fallen man's being. Let us state it concisely before elaborating and offering confirmation. The spiritual impotency of the natural man is total and entire, irreparable and irremediable as far as all human efforts are concerned. Fallen man is utterly indisposed and disabled—thoroughly opposed to God and His law, wholly inclined unto evil. Sooner would thistles yield grapes than fallen man originate a spiritual volition.

At the close of last month's article, we supplied a number of proofs that man's nature is now thoroughly corrupt. This is seen in the fact that he is sinful from his earliest years, yea, that the first dawnings of reason in a child are fouled by sin. It appears, too, in that men sin continually—as Jeremiah 13:23 expresses it, they are “accustomed to do evil.” It is also evidenced by the universal prevalence of this disease, for it is not only some, or even the great majority, but all without exception are depraved. It is demonstrated by their freedom therein. All sin continually of their own accord. A child has only to be left to himself and he will quickly put his mother to shame. Moreover, they cannot be restrained—neither education nor religious instruction, expostulation or threats (human or divine) will deter them—that which is bred in the bone, comes out in the flesh. Corruption can neither be eradicated nor moderated. The tongue is a little member, yet God Himself declares it is one which “no man can tame” (see Jam 3:8).

“The law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). The first thing which attends every law as such is its rule or sway, “The law hath dominion over [literally “lordeth it over”] a man as long as he liveth” (Rom 7:1). The giving of law is the act of a superior, and it belongs to its very nature to exact obedience by way of dominion. Now the “law of sin” possesses no moral authority over its subjects, but because it exerts a powerful and effectual dominion over its slaves it is rightly denominated a “law.” Though it has no rightful government over men, yet it has the equivalent, for it dominates as a king—“Sin hath reigned unto death” (Rom 5:21). Because believers have been delivered from the complete dominion of this evil monarch, they are exhorted, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). Here we learn what is the precise case with the unregenerate—sin reigns, undisputedly, within them, and they yield ready and full obedience thereto.

The second thing which attends all law as such is its sanctions, which have an efficacy to move those who are under it unto the things which it requires. In other words, a law has rewards and penalties accompanying it, which serve as inducements to obedience, even though the things commanded are unpleasant. Speaking generally, all laws owe their efficacy unto the reward and punishments annexed to them. Nor is the “law of sin”—indwelling corruption—any exception. The pleasures and profits which sin promises unto its subjects are rewards which the vast majority of men lose their souls to obtain. We have a striking illustration of this when the law of sin

contended in Moses against the law of grace, “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb 11:25-26).

In the above example we see the conflict which was in the mind of Moses between the law of sin and the law of grace. The motive on the part of the law of sin, whereunto it sought to influence him and wherewith it prevails over the majority, was the temporary reward which it set before him, namely, the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin—by that it contended with the eternal reward annexed to the law of grace, called here “the recompense of the reward.” By this wretched reward does the law of sin keep the whole world in obedience to its commands. How powerful and potent this influence is, both Scripture, observation, and personal experience teach us. This it was which induced our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit, Esau to sell his birthright, Balaam to hire himself to Balak, Judas to betray the Saviour. This it is which now moves the vast majority of our fellows to prefer mammon than God, Belial than Christ, the things of time and sense than spiritual and eternal realities.

The law of sin also has penalties with which it threatens any who are urged to cast off its yoke. These are the sneers, the ostracism, the persecutions of their fellows. The law of sin announces to us votaries that nothing but unhappiness and suffering is the portion of those who would be in subjection to God, that His service is a “kill joy.” It represents the yoke of Christ as a grievous burden, His Gospel as quite unsuited to those who are young and healthy, the Christian life as a gloomy and miserable thing. Whatever troubles and tribulations come upon the people of God because of their fidelity to Him, whatever hardships and denying of self the duties of mortification require, are represented by the law of sin as so many penalties attending the neglect of its commands. By these it prevails over the “fearful, and unbelieving,” who have no share in the life eternal (Rev 21:8). And it is hard to say wherein lies its greater strength—its pretended rewards or its pretended punishments.

The power and effect of this law of sin appears from its very nature. It is not an outward, inoperative, directing law, but an inbred, working, and effectual law. A law which is proposed to us cannot be compared for efficacy with a law bred in us. God wrote the moral law upon tables of stone and now it is found in the Scriptures; but what is its efficacy? As it is external to men and proposed unto them, does it enable them to perform the things which it requires? No indeed, the Moral Law is rendered “weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3)—indwelling corruption makes it impossible for man to meet its demands. And how does God deliver from this awful bondage? In this present life by making His law internal for His elect, for at their regeneration He makes good that promise, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer 31:33). Thus His law now becomes an internal, living, operative, and effectual principle within them.

Now such is “the law of sin”—it is all indwelling law. It is “sin that dwelleth in me,” it is “in my members”—yea, it is so far in a man as in one sense it is said to be the man himself. “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:21, 23, 18). From this consideration we may perceive the full dominion which it has over the natural man. It always abides in the soul and is never absent. It “dwelleth” in us—there is its constant residence. It does not come upon the soul only at certain seasons, for then much might be accomplished during its absence and the soul might fortify itself against it. No, it never leaves its abode. Wherever we are, whatever we be engaged in, this law of sin is present. Whether we are alone or in company, by night or by day, it is our constant companion. A ruthless enemy indwells our soul. How little is this considered by men! O the woeful security of the unregenerate—a fire is in their bones, fast

consuming them. How little does the watchfulness of most professing Christians correspond to the danger of their state.

Being an indwelling law, sin applies itself unto its work with great facility and ease. It needs to force open no doors or employ any engines whatever. The soul cannot apply itself to any duty but what it must be by those very faculties in which this law has its residence. Let the mind or understanding be applied unto anything and there is ignorance, darkness, madness, to contend with. Take the will, and there is in it spiritual deadness, mulish stubbornness, devilish obstinacy. Are the affections of the heart set upon divine objects? How can they, when they are wholly inclined toward the world and present things, and are prone to all vanity and defilements? Water rises above its own level. How easy is it, then, for indwelling sin to insinuate itself into all we do, hindering whatever is good and furthering whatever is evil. Does conscience seek to assert itself? then our corruptions soon teach us to turn a deaf ear unto its voice.

The seat of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere declares to be the heart. “Out of the heart are the issues of life” (see Pro 4:23). It is there that indwelling corruption keeps its special residence. It is there this evil monarch holds court. It has invaded and possessed the throne of God within us. “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live” (Ecc 9:3). Here is the source of all the madness which appears in their lives. “All these evil things [mentioned in Mar 7:21-22] come from within, and defile the man” (Mar 7:23). There are many outward temptations and provocations which befall man, which excite and stir them up unto many evils, yet they merely broach the vessel and let out what is stored within it. “An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luk 6:45). This “evil treasure” or store is the principle of all moral action on the part of the natural man. Temptations and occasions put nothing into men, but only draw out what was in them before. The root and spring of all wickedness lies in the center of our corrupt being.

Let us next consider the outstanding property of indwelling sin, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). That which is here called “the carnal mind” is the same as “the law of sin.” It is to be solemnly noted that the carnal mind is not only an enemy, for as such there would be a possibility of some reconciliation with God, but it is “enmity” itself and so not capable of accepting any terms of peace. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot. The only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy their enmity. So the apostle tells us, “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10)—that is, a supernatural work has been accomplished in the elect on the ground of the merits of Christ’s sacrifice, which results in the reconciliation of those who were enemies. But when the apostle came to speak of “enmity,” there was no other way but for it to be destroyed, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity” (Eph 2:15).

Let it also be duly considered that the apostle used a noun and not an adjective, “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). He did not say that it is merely opposed to God, but it is positive opposition itself. It is not black but blackness. It is not an enemy, it is enmity. It is not corrupt, but corruption itself—not rebellious, but rebellion. As Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) so succinctly expressed it, “The heart, though it be deceitful, is positively deceitful. It is evil in the concrete, sin in the essence. It is the distillation, the quintessence of all things that are vile. It is not envious against God, it is enmity itself—not at enmity, it is actual enmity.” Unspeakably dreadful is this. To the same effect are those fearful words of the psalmist, “Their inward part is very wickedness” (Psa 5:9)—beyond that human language cannot go.

This carnal mind is in every fallen creature—not even excluding the infant at its mother’s breast. How many who had the best of parents have turned out the worst of sons and daughters? This carnal mind is in each of us every moment of our lives. It is there just as truly when we are unconscious of its presence, as when we are sensible of the risings in us of opposition to God. The wolf may sleep, but it is a wolf still. The snake may slumber amid the flowers, and a child may stroke its back, but it is a snake still. The sea is the house of storms even when it is placid as a lake. And the heart, when we perceive not its ebb and flow, when it belches not forth the hot stones of its corruption, is still the same dread volcano.

The extent of this fearful enmity appears in the fact that the whole of the carnal mind is opposed to God—every part, every power, every passion of it. Every faculty of man’s being has been affected by the Fall. Take the memory—is it not a solemn fact that we retain evil things far more easily than those which are good? that we can recollect a foolish song much more readily than we can a passage of Scripture! We grasp with an iron hand things which concern our temporal interests, but hold with feeble fingers those which respect our eternal welfare. Take the imagination—why is it that when a man given that which well nigh intoxicates him, or when he is drugged with opium, that his imagination soars as on eagles wings? Why does not the imagination work thus when the body is in a normal condition? Simply because it is depraved, and unless our body enters a foul element the fancy will not hold high carnival. Take the judgment—how vain, often how mad are its reasoning, even in the wisest of men.

This fearful enmity is irremediable, “For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Even though divine grace intervene and subdue its force, yet it effects not the slightest change in its nature. It may not be so powerful and effectual in operation as when it had more life and freedom, yet it is enmity still. As every drop of poison is poison and will infect, as every spark of fire is fire and will burn, so is every part and degree of the law of sin enmity—it will poison, it will burn. The apostle Paul can surely be regarded as having made as much progress in the subduing of this enmity as any man on earth, yet, notwithstanding, he exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 7:24) and cried for deliverance from this irreconcilable enmity. Mortification abates its awful force, but it does not effect any reformation in it. Whatever effect divine grace may work upon it, no change is wrought in it.

Not only is this awful enmity inbred in every one of Adam’s fallen race, not only has it captured and dominated every faculty of our beings, not only is it present within us every moment of our lives, not only is it incapable of reconciliation, but most frightful of all, this indwelling sin is enmity against God. In other passages it is exhibited as its own enemy, “Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11). Those indwelling corruptions are ever seeking to destroy us. This deadly poison of sin, this ruinous law of indwelling evil, ever opposes the new nature, or law of grace and holiness in the believer. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit” (Gal 5:17)—that is, the principle of sin fights against and seeks to vanquish the principle of spirituality. But O dreadful to relate, its proper formal object is God Himself—it is “enmity against God.”

This frightful enemy has, as it were, received from Satan the same command which the Assyrians had from their monarch, “Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel” (1Ki 22:31). It is neither against small nor great, but against JEHOVAH Himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself. This appears in the judgments which men form of God. What is the natural man’s estimate of the Creator and Ruler of this world? Let answer be returned from the vast regions of heathendom. Behold, the horrible superstitions, the disgusting rites, the hideous symbols of deity, the cruel penances, and gross immoralities which everywhere prevail in lands

without the Gospel, and consider the appalling abominations which for so long passed and which in numerous instances still pass, under the sacred name of divine worship. These are not merely the products of ignorance of God, but are the immediate fruits of positive enmity against Him.

But we need not go so far afield as heathendom. The same terrible feature confronts us here at home in Christendom. Witness the multiple and horrible errors which prevail on every side in the religious realm today—the degrading and insulting views of the Most High now held by the great majority of church members. And what of the vast multitudes of those who make no profession at all? They think of and act toward the great JEHOVAH as One who is to be little regarded and respected. They consider Him as One entitled to very little esteem, yea, scarcely worthy of any notice at all. “Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” (Job 21:14-15)—such is the language of their hearts and lives, if it be not actually so with their lips.

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD

We now come to consider, second, its rule. Righteousness in creatures is according to some law, which is the rule of it and to which it is conformed. The Moral Law of God, which is holy, just, and good, is our rule of righteousness or right doing. But the Most High has no law outside Himself. He is a law to Himself. His nature and His will are the law and rule of righteousness to Him. This is an attribute common to the three persons in the Godhead. Necessarily so, since They partake of the same undivided essence. Hence we find the first person is designated the “righteous Father” (Joh 17:25), the Son is called “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jo 2:1), and that it is proper to the Holy Spirit is evident from the fact that He is here to convict the world “of righteousness” (Joh 16:8). As the present aspect of our subject is of such great importance we must endeavour to give it our best attention.

“The will of God is the highest rule of justice, so that what He wills must be considered just—for this very reason, because He willed it. When it is inquired, therefore, why the Lord did so? the answer must be, Because He would. But if you further ask why He so determined, you are in search of something greater and higher than the will of God, which can never be found” (Calvin’s Institutes, book 3, chapter 3, section 2). How great was the light granted to the eminent Reformer and how clearly and boldly he expressed himself thereon. What a contrast from the obscurity which now obtains in this so-called age of enlightenment, with its ambiguous, hesitant, and apologetic declarations. That Calvin was by no means alone in this exalted view will appear from other quotations given below.

In answer to the question, “Why was it that Adam was permitted to fall and corrupt his whole posterity when God could have prevented his fall?” Luther (Martin, 1483-1546) said, “God is a Being whose will acknowledges no cause: neither is it for us to prescribe rules to His sovereign pleasure, or call Him to account for what He does. He has neither superior nor equal, and His will is the rule of all things. He did not therefore will such and such things because they were right and He was bound to will them, but they are therefore equitable and right because He wills them. The will of men can indeed be influenced and moved but God’s will never can. To assert the contrary is to undeify Him” (Bondage of Man’s Will). To the same effect Bucer (Martin, 1491-1551) said,

“God has no other motive to what He does than His own mere will, which will is so far from being unrighteous, it is justice itself.”

God is absolute Lord, so that, “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). And why not? Because He not only has the might but also the fullest right to do as He pleases. None was before Him, none is above Him. Nay, He has no equal to direct Him, and therefore there is none unto whom He must render an account of His matters. What God ordains for us and what He orders from us is just and right simply because He so wills it. Hence it was that Abraham looked upon it as a righteous act to slay his innocent son. But why did he so esteem it—because the written law of God authorized murder? No. On the contrary, both the law of God and the law of nature peremptorily forbade it, but the holy patriarch well knew that the will of God is the only rule of justice and that whatever He is pleased to command is on that very account righteous.

“What is the justice of God? It is an essential property in God, whereby He is infinitely just in Himself, of Himself, for, from, and by Himself alone, and no other. What is the rule of this justice? His own free will and nothing else for whatsoever He wills is just, and because He wills it, it is just, and not because it is just therefore He wills it” (James Usher, [1581-1656] *Body of Divinity*). In answering the objection that “It is unjust for God to inflict eternal punishment upon temporary offenses, there being no proportion between the infinite and the finite, the Puritan, Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), wisely began his reply by saying, “First, God’s will is the rule of righteousness and therefore whatever He doeth or shall do must needs be righteous. He is Lord of all—He has a sovereign right, and an absolute supremacy over the creature” (Vol. 6, p. 213).

We have added one quotation after another from these renowned servants of God of the past because the truth which we are now labouring has been repudiated in quarters in which it was not to be expected. Even in circles which might justly be termed orthodox—where in the main the onslaughts of infidelity were steadfastly resisted and the “landmarks” of the fathers steadily maintained—the sharp edge of the Spirit’s sword was dulled and those aspects of truth most of all repellant to human pride toned down. In their well-meant efforts to refute the errors of Socinians, a few even of the Puritans suffered their zeal to override knowledge, so that in their determination to concede nothing unto their opponents, they sacrificed some important elements of the truth, and only too often later generations have followed their lead rather than those who were uncompromising.

In the above paragraph we alluded to those who have, under the guise of magnifying God’s holiness, subordinated the divine will to the divine nature, insisting that, things are not just because God has commanded them, but He has commanded them because they are just.” Our meaning is that there was a reason for them in the nature of things, and that therefore He has enforced them by His authority. In plain language, they mean that the Most High was not free to frame whatever laws He pleased, but was limited by the fitness of things, that His imperial will must conform to some standard *ab extra* to itself. Before we examine this position more closely, and turn upon it the light of Holy Writ, we will give yet one or two further quotations from eminent servants of God in the past for the purpose of showing how radically it differs from what they taught.

Thomas Manton (1620-1677), who was personal chaplain to Sir Oliver Cromwell, took the position that in contemplating the divine justice, “God must be considered under a twofold relation: as absolute Lord, and as Governor and Judge of the world. As absolute Lord, His justice is nothing but the absolute and free motion of His own will concerning the estate of His creatures.

In this respect God is wholly arbitrary and has no other rule but His own will. He does not will things because they are just, but therefore they are just because He wills them. He has a right of making and framing anything as He wills in any manner as it pleases Him...As Governor and Judge, He gives a law to His creatures, and His governing justice consists in giving all their due according to His law” (Vol. 8, pp. 438-439).

“The will of God is so the cause of all things as to be itself without cause—for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything—so that the divine will is the ne plus ultra of all our inquiries—when we ascend to that, we can go no further. Hence we find every matter resolved ultimately into the mere sovereign pleasure of God as the spring and occasion of whatever is done in heaven and earth...The only reason that can be assigned why the deity does this or that is because it is His own free pleasure so to do” (from the pen of the author of “Rock of Ages” and other well-known hymns, in his “Observations on the Divine Attributes,” 1750). Such teaching as this alone preserves the divine independence and presents the true God in His unrivalled freedom and supremacy, unhampered by anything within or without Himself.

But against this God-exalting teaching it is objected that such postulates obliterate all distinction between God’s sovereignty and His justice, merging the latter entirely into the former. With equal justification might we complain that the objector fails to maintain any distinction between the divine holiness and the divine justice, making the former to completely swallow up the latter. Should it be asked, Wherein shall we distinguish between the divine holiness and justice? We answer, the one has to do more with what God is, the other respects what He does. Or to state it in other words, holiness pertains to the divine character, justice to His office. Thus, “Justice and judgment are the habitation [and “foundation”] of thy throne” (Psa 89:14), that is, they relate to His public administration, to the government of His creatures. It is as Ruler and Judge that the divine justice is exercised and displayed.

As to the objection that we obliterate all distinctions between the divine sovereignty and justice, our reply is that we cannot do otherwise if our thoughts are to be formed entirely by the Scriptures. “Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). There is no getting around that explicit statement, and to it we must rigidly subordinate our minds and formulate our theology if we are to “think God’s thoughts after Him.” Observe well it is not here said that God works all things according to the exigencies of His holiness, or according to the dictates of His wisdom, but “according to the counsel of his own will.” True, blessedly true, that every volition of His is both a holy and a wise one, yet God alone decided what is holy and what is wise. He is under no law and tied by no rules, but ever acts according to His own good pleasure and that alone—and very frequently He does that which is flatly contrary to our ideas both of wisdom and justice.

It is this very fact which infidels and agnostics have sought to make captive out of. In the face of what confronts them both in creation and in providence, they have drawn the conclusion that either the Almighty is a capricious or cruel tyrant, or that having brought the world into existence, He has withdrawn and left it to work out its own destiny. They ask, Why are there such glaring inequalities in nature—one child being born normal and another cripple, one enjoying health, and the other being a sufferer all its days? Why are some born under a government which gives them freedom while others are doomed to abject slavery? Why have some men more enlarged understanding than others and some stronger passions than their neighbours? Why is it that virtue so often passes unrewarded and the wicked flourish and prosper? If it be replied, All of this is the consequence of sin, then the infidel asks, Why is there untold suffering among innocent animals?

And what is the answer to these expressions of unbelief, these outbursts of rebellion? How shall we silence those who wickedly affirm that the works and ways of the Most High are stamped with injustice? Or what is far more to the point, how are young Christians to be dealt with who are disturbed by such troublers of their peace? The blatant enemies of the Lord we can well-afford to treat with silent contempt, for the great JEHOVAH needs no efforts of ours to vindicate His character—in due time He will Himself close their mouths. But as to removing such stumbling stones from the path of our fellow pilgrims, there is but one satisfactory and sufficient way, and that is by maintaining the sovereign rights of Him with whom we have to do—by insisting that He is the Potter and we but clay in His hands to be molded just as He pleases.

Why has God given light to the sun, grass to the fields, heat to fire, and cold to ice? Why, in short, has He done any of those things which we see He has done when He could easily have done otherwise? There is only one adequate answer—In the varied manifestations of His attributes and in the communication of good or evil to His creatures, God has acted according to the sovereignty of His own will. Nor is it to the slightest degree unbecoming that God should act thus. Sovereignty is the most godlike of all the perfections of the divine character, for it is that on which the awful supremacy of the great JEHOVAH chiefly rests. Our concept of “the high and lofty one who inhabiteth eternity” would not be raised but lowered if we discovered that He was hampered in His actions. The display of His own glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords must take precedence over everything else.

“The LORD is upright...there is no unrighteousness in him” (Psa 92:15). Yet this is patent not to carnal sight, but to the vision of faith alone. The eyes of the naturally blind cannot discern the light of the sun, nevertheless it is full of light. In like manner, the eyes of the spiritually blind are incapable of perceiving the equity of God’s ways, yet they are all righteous. But we repeat, they are righteous not because they are conformed to some external standard of excellence, nor even because they are in harmony with one of the divine attributes, but solely because they are the ways of Him who “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). God’s commanding Abimelech to deliver Sarah to Abraham, or else He would destroy both him and his household (Gen 20:7), may seem unjust in man’s estimation, but has not the great God the right to do as He pleases?

Take the most extreme example of all—God’s choosing one unto eternal life and another unto eternal death. Yet none who, by grace, bow to the authority of Holy Writ find any stumblingblock therein. Though they do not profess to understand the reason for God so acting, yet they unhesitatingly acknowledge His right so to do. Distrusting their conceptions of justice and injustice, they submit to the high sovereignty of Him who is Lord over all. And it is this very submission which brings to their hearts a peace which passes all understanding. Amid the profound mysteries of life, the perplexities of their own lot, though God’s judgments are a “great deep” and His ways often “past finding out,” they have the unshakable assurance that the Judge of all the earth has done, is doing, and shall do, “right.”

And why is it that the believer is so confident that simply because God does a thing it is necessarily right and good? Because he has learned this very lesson from the lips of Christ, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:25-26). Observe the character in which the Father is here viewed, “Lord of heaven and earth,” that is, as Sovereign supreme with indisputable right. Note the basis of action which the Redeemer attributes unto Him, “for so it seemed good in thy sight.” No other explanation is vouchsafed, none other is needed, that is all-sufficient. Finally, mark well His “even so”—

however strange it may seem to us, that closes the door to all impious inquiry and speculation. We are not to be the judges of God's actions, but the doers of His will. His own "good pleasure" (Phi 2:13) is His only rule.

Moreover, let it not be forgotten that Christ conducted Himself in perfect consonance with His public declarations. In Gethsemane, we find that He resolved His sufferings into the sovereign pleasure of the Father. How striking and how blessed to hear Him say, "Thy will be done" (see Luk 22:42). This is the more remarkable and most pertinent to the point before us, when we note that He immediately prefaced His acquiescence by affirming, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mar 14:36). How plainly do such words expose the error of those who contend there was an absolute necessity why God must punish sin, and why if His people were to be pardoned a Substitute must suffer in their stead. Christ knew God had willed that He should drink this awful cup, and He meekly submitted thereto, but He made it crystal clear that God had willed this not because His nature demanded the same, but simply because this was the way His own good pleasure had selected.

Those words, "All things are possible unto thee" (Mar 14:36), in such a connection prove beyond all shadow of doubt that the Father acted freely, and without any compulsion from His holiness or justice in appointing Christ to make satisfaction for the sins of His people. Scripture nowhere says that He can by no means clear the guilty, but rather that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7). In like manner, the apostle Paul was moved to write, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom 9:22). It was not that any necessity of His nature demanded He should do so, but because it was the pleasure of His own imperial will so to do.

As it has been pointed out above, we must distinguish sharply between the absolute freedom possessed by God as Lord over all, and that which His perfections require from Him under the economy He was pleased to institute. His fidelity requires Him to make good His promises and His veracity to fulfill His threatenings, but He was under no constraint whatever to make any promises or threatenings. His justice requires Him to impartially administer the law He has given, but He was under no absolute necessity of framing any law at all. Sin is a disease—could He not have sovereignly healed it had He so pleased? Sins are "debts"—was He unable to cancel them had He so desired? Perish such a thought! It is argued that God is "a consuming fire" (Deu 4:24) and that fire cannot but burn when it comes into contact with that which is combustible. Have such foolish objectors forgotten that fire burns only as God orders it so to do? It consumed not the bush, nor the three Hebrews in Babylon's furnace! God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own WILL" (Eph 1:11).

## **XMAS**

"Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa 1:12). This question was asked Israel of old by JEHOVAH with regard to their "vain oblations," which He declared were an "abomination" unto Him. Well may He issue the same searching inquiry to the peoples of Christendom in connection with their annual carnal gratifications and financial extravagances in the celebrating of "Xmas." Most certainly the Lord Himself does not require it. Nowhere in His Word has He bidden us to

celebrate the birth of His Son, and nowhere in the New Testament is there any record that the early Christians did so. Therefore, if even a religious commemoration of the incarnation of the Saviour receives not the slightest warrant from the Scriptures, then how much less does the worldly and fleshly celebrating thereof find justification therein?

If, then, God has not required anyone to memorialize the birth of Christ, who has? Who are the ones that have introduced and popularized this innovation? The first answer is, the Papacy. This is unmistakably evident from the name given to this season, for “Xmas” is but an abbreviation of “Christ-mass.” It is Rome and those sections of Protestantism which never succeeded in completely shaking off her shackles who have engineered this monstrosity. Second, it is the Mammonites who saw their opportunity to make capital out of the same. They have commercialized this season for their own mercenary gain, for probably more money changes hand during December than in any three months together. Third, the lovers of pleasure have united with the lovers of money to make this season one of festivity and feasting, in which they can gratify their carnal lusts to the full.

There are few things in the world today which so plainly evidence how rapidly and how thoroughly so called “Protestantism” is being Romanized as the observance of “Xmas” by both church-goers and the masses who make no religious profession. The Papists have been quick to seize such an opportunity for the promotion of Mariolatry. And sad it is to see the watchmen on Zion’s walls asleep at their posts of duty, instead of sounding the alarm. With very few exceptions, so called Protestant churches and chapels yield to the popular demand and have their “special Christmas services.” How the pope and his satellites must chuckle at the folly of those whose fathers once stood as a firm bulwark against her insidious approaches. Reader, you are playing into the hands of Rome if you observe “Xmas.”

There are few things today which more clearly and tragically demonstrate that the line of demarcation between the church and the world has been blotted out than the way in which those claiming to be saints join arm in arm with the godless at this festive season. What an anomaly! Why the very term “saint” signifies a separated one—a one who has severed himself from those who despise and reject his Lord and Saviour. What an anomaly we say, to behold the alleged friends of Christ making common cause with His enemies in an orgy of money-spending, carnal gluttony, and merry making. How empty their claim to belong unto God’s “peculiar people” (Ti 2:14). How worthless their profession that they are “strangers and pilgrims” here (1Pe 2:11)! Reader, you are acting the part of an utter worldling if you observe “Xmas.”

“I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the church and the world made broader and stronger. Nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of church members saying, ‘Well, there is no harm in this, there is no harm in that,’ and getting as near to the world as possible. We are to avoid the very appearance of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having your parties, your children’s sports, and all that kind of thing. I would have you doubly jealous. Do recollect, church members, that you are to be Christians always, if Christians at all. We do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther’s day, you are always to wear your regimentals as Christian soldiers, and never, at any time, to say, ‘I shall do this just now. It is only once a year. I shall do as the world does. I cannot be out of the fashion.’ You must be either out of the fashion or out of the true church. Recollect that, because the place for Christ’s church is altogether out of the fashion. You are called to go forth without the camp, bearing His reproach. If you want to be in the camp, you cannot be Christ’s disciple. You must be a separated one or be lost.” (Charles H. Spurgeon).

Those words are found in a sermon preached by that fearless man of God in “Xmas” week of 1867. How much stronger would be his language were he on earth today, witnessing the vast majority of church-members joining with the irreligious in this mad saturnalia, for mad it certainly is, even taking it on its lowest grounds. Think of the money which is wasted in the exchange of “Xmas presents”! How tragic to witness, as we did all through last December, little tots, poorly clad, sent out night after night on to the streets, exposed to the bitter cold and snow, singing “Xmas Carols” and calling from house to house for pennies to hand over to their beer-drinking parents. Police ignoring such a breach of the law (as they now do the breaking of others) and professing Christians encouraging them by handing them money.

“If any man will come after me,” said the Redeemer, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mat 16:24). Saving grace is not merely a theological term but a divine dynamic, “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Ti 2:12). But what denying of self is there by those who observe “Xmas”? What indeed—it is the very opposite—ungodly and worldly lusts are freely indulged, and instead of heeding that divine precept, “Make not provision for the flesh” (Rom 13:14), it is blatantly trampled underfoot by “the church” and the world alike. This in itself should be sufficient to open the eyes of real Christians to this glaring evil if they have never been previously warned thereon.

“A merry Christmas.” What a travesty! What a mockery! Was the Christ of God accorded a “Merry Christmas” when He entered this world? Was He given an open-hearted welcome? Far, very far from it, as the manger cradle manifested. The fact is that His presence was not wanted. “No room” in the inn was indicative, symptomatic, prophetic of the days of His public ministry, when oftentimes He “hath not where to lay his head” (Mat 8:20). Behold the Lord of glory, my reader, first opening His incarnate eyes in a stable and then ask yourself is that a fit object and subject for merry making? We are well-aware that this brief article is likely to be distasteful to some of our readers (because it condemns them), but suppose it is a message which God has prompted! In such case it will rise up in judgment against you in the day to come if you disregard its warning and continue to further Rome’s activities and join hands with the world in its Christ-insulting merriment.



# November

## **THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL**

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). It remains for us now to notice the three things here said about God’s people. These are their guilt, their deliverance, their righteousness. First, our criminality. It was because we lay under the curse of the law that the Holy One of God was made sin for us. Therein we may perceive the awful demerits of our case—such a drastic and costly remedy makes unmistakably evident the desperateness of our condition by nature. We best learn God’s estimate of sin by the wages He pays it. Nowhere is its exceeding sinfulness so apparent as at the cross. Faulty views of the atonement necessarily result in low estimates of sin. Contrariwise, nothing is so calculated to humble us because of our vileness as faith’s contemplation of Christ being made a curse for us.

Second, our deliverance. This was something which lay wholly beyond our own powers. Impossible that we could undo the past, equally impossible that we could offer unto God any satisfaction for our countless transgressions. We could no more change our fallen natures than the Ethiopian can change the colour of his skin. To create a world would be no less impracticable than for a depraved creature to produce the fruits of holiness. So far as we were concerned, our case was utterly hopeless—unless divine mercy took pity upon us, we must inevitably perish. That mercy took the form not of an arbitrary command nor simply of invincible power, but by ordering that none other than the Son of God should become man, take our place, assume our responsibilities, and discharge our debts. It was by the sufferings of Christ we were eternally freed from condemnation.

Third, our righteousness. Here is the blessedness and glory of the Gospel of God’s grace—that we who are totally devoid of righteousness, who are positively unrighteous, guilty, yea, whose best performances are “filthy rags” (Isa 64:6) in the sight of heaven, become the very “righteousness of God in him.” Note well those words “in him,” and not in ourselves, for the reference is not to sanctification, but to our justification, not to our state, but to our standing before the divine throne. “Righteousness” is here to be taken in its forensic sense, and not as referring to any moral change, to the ground of our acceptance, and not to any disposition of mind or heart wrought in us by the Spirit. The abstract is used for the purpose of emphasis. It is not merely that we are accepted as righteous, but the very ground on which that rests is stated—we become “righteousness” itself.

It is of vital importance that we should have a clear Scriptural conception of this fundamental truth. The believer becomes righteousness solely by imputation, just as Christ was “made sin” solely by imputation. True, there are inseparable consequences in each instance. For just as

Christ's being made sin led to His being dealt with accordingly, so our becoming righteousness judicially entails the sanctifying work of the Spirit in us experimentally. But our text is not treating of the effects in either case, but goes right back to bed-rock causes. In precisely the same way that Christ was made sin for us—namely, by God's imputing to Him the entire guilt of our iniquities—so we become the righteousness of God in Him—namely, by God's imputing to us the whole merits of Christ's law-magnifying obedience.

The antithesis is exact and minute. As our guilt was charged to Christ, so His righteousness is reckoned to our account. As the transference of our guilt to the Surety entailed His suffering the penalty thereof, so the imputation of Christ's obedience unto us entitles us to its reward. As it was for no criminal acts of His own that Christ was made sin—so it is not by any pious conduct of ours that we become righteousness before the divine tribunal. As it was not on account of any infection of nature or any personal acts of sin that Christ was treated by divine justice as an offender, so it is not in view of any holiness wrought in us that we are accepted of God and pronounced just by His law. It is “by the obedience of one,” and not by the works of each believer, that the many are “made [legally constituted] righteous” (Rom 5:19).

Let us call attention to a parallel passage, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). Thus once more we see how helpfully Scripture explains Scripture, for by carefully weighing the terms of this prophecy we are supplied with a sure interpretation of our text. First, the fact of our Saviour's vicarious suffering is stated, those sufferings being inflicted upon Him for our iniquities. Second, the explanation of this solemn transaction is given—punishment was visited upon the Redeemer because the guilt of His people's sins had been laid upon Him. Third, the blessed outcome of this is declared—His being wounded ensures our healing. The “stripes” were all due to us, and they were due to us because of our transgressions, but because our iniquities were imputed to Christ, the stripes were laid upon Him, and therefore healing comes to be ours.

The grand truth affirmed in our text is the exchange of places. It is the twofold exchange of places in respect of sin and righteousness severally, and the counter imputations thereof. This is set forth by an antithesis, which fully drawn out would read, “He hath made him that knew no sin to be sin for us: that we [who knew no righteousness] might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). But there is one word where the parallel is departed from, though this is hidden in our English translation. God “made [constituted] Christ to be sin for us,” but it is not said in the balancing clause, “that we might be made the righteousness of God”—an entirely different Greek word is used, and would be better rendered, “that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” And why? Because this righteousness is only “upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:22). The price was paid when Christ died. Our actual possession thereof is when we are planted into Him by faith.

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *15. Fasting—Matthew 6:16-18*

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:16-18). These words brought to a close the fourth division of our Lord’s address, a division which covered the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, the subject of which is the performing of good works in such a manner as to secure the approval of God. Fasting is mentioned last of the three branches of practical righteousness, because it is not so much a duty for its own sake, as a means to dispose us for other duties.

Fasting is the abstaining from food for a religious purpose. Though there is no express commandment in either the law or the Gospel binding us thereto, yet it is plain both from precept and practice in the Old and New Testaments alike that there are occasions when fasting is both needful and helpful. Though there is nothing meritorious in it, fasting is both an appropriate sign and a valuable means. It should be the outward sign of an inward mortification. It is the opposite of feasting, which expresses joy and merriment. It is a voluntary denying ourselves of those creature comforts to which we are ordinarily accustomed. Rightly engaged in it should be found a valuable adjunct to prayer, particularly for afflicting our souls when expressing sorrow for sin. As to the frequency and the duration thereof this must largely be determined by our ordinary habits, our constitutions, and our vocations.

So depraved is the human heart and so prone is man to rest in externals that he changes what was originally the means or sign unto the end itself. Thus we find the Pharisee boasting that he fasted “twice in the week” (Luk 18:12). Thus that which was designed as a simple means to further and to testify humiliation, repentance, and zeal in prayer, was perverted into a meritorious performance which produced self-complacency. But what was still worse, the Pharisees made a stage play of this holy ordinance and resorted to various hypocritical devices therein in order to further their reputation among men for extraordinary piety and devotion. They advertised what should have been a secret between their souls and God. They employed a counterfeit sadness and ostentatious grief, and thereby reduced to a farce and a mockery what should have been held in great sanctity.

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast” (Mat 6:16). This was our Lord’s first word on the subject of fasting, and like His first on prayer it consists in a warning against hypocrisy therein. This is very searching and should be seriously taken to heart by all of us. Every species of pride is exceedingly foolish and most obnoxious unto the Lord, but the worst form of all is spiritual pride, and especially that which aims at securing the applause of our fellows. Fasting, if it be genuine, arises from a deep sense of our utter unworthiness and is designed to express our self-loathing before God. To make the same into a pedestal from which we proclaim our humility and sanctity is indeed a turning of light into darkness.

“When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast” (Mat 6:16). It may be inquired, How is such a prohibition as this to be harmonized with Joel 1:13-14, where God required the Jews to “lament” and “howl” in their fast which could scarcely be without a mournful countenance? In a true fast must not the sorrow of the heart necessarily be testified by some convenient signs of mourning and appropriate gestures of the body? The answer is, that Christ was not here condemning a sorrowful countenance in fasting when a just occasion for the same is offered, for godly Nehemiah looked sad (Neh 2:2). Instead, our Lord was here engaged in reprehending the wicked deceits of the Pharisees, who deliberately feigned an appearance of great sorrow when in fact their hearts were devoid of contrition. This is quite clear from His next words.

“When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast” (Mat 6:16). But to this it might also be objected, Did not some of God’s own people in the past disfigure their faces in various ways and that with divine approval? For example, are we not informed that Ezra plucked off the hairs of his head and of his beard (Ezr 9:3), and are we not told that Joshua and his fellows fell to the ground upon their faces and put dust upon their heads (Jos 7:6)? But each of those cases were spontaneous expressions of deep sorrow of heart—something quite different from what our Lord was here rebuking. He blames the Pharisees for disfiguring their faces, first, because this was the chief, yea the only thing they had respect unto in their fasts, namely, the outward show thereof, which God hated. And second, because the word “disfigure” here signifies the very abolishing of their comeliness. They deliberately took means to look wan and emaciated so that they might the better advertise their fasting.

Instead of keeping to the privacy of their homes on fast days and using the time in those sacred exercises of which fasting is both the means and the sign, the Pharisees went abroad, and like stage players, paraded all the marks of a state of mind which they did not feel, but which they desired that others should believe they experienced. They assumed a sad countenance. “They employed all the usual tokens of deep afflictions and mental distress. They covered their heads with dust and ashes, veiled their countenances, neglected their dress, and deformed their features by contracting them into the most gloomy and dejected looks. They studiously exhibited all the external appearances of humiliation, while their hearts were lifted up in spiritual pride” (John Brewster, 1753-1842).

Ere passing on, let it be duly noted that it was the practice of the scribes and Pharisees not only to fast, but also to be very punctilious in observing the outward rites and signs pertaining to religious fasts. Nevertheless, as in the former works of alms-giving and prayer, so in this, the principal thing was lacking—namely, truth and sincerity in the heart. Their grief-stricken face proceeded not from broken hearts. They were whole and righteous in their own conceits and needed neither the great Physician nor regeneration of soul. In this we may see a true exemplification of the properties of the natural man in matters of spiritual moment. They are more concerned with external deeds than in having the truth in their inward parts. They content themselves with their outward performances and have little or no regard to worshipping in the spirit. In like manner, the wicked Ahab went to much trouble in humbling himself outwardly, from fear of punishment (1Ki 21:27), yet continued in his sins.

How often it was thus with Israel of old. They went through the form of humbling themselves and seeking God’s favour, when as David said, “They did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant” (Psa 78:36-37). And thus it is generally with natural man. The whole religion of the deluded Papists stands in outward ceremonial acts, partly Jewish and partly heathen, and when they have observed them they look no further. And it is no better with tens of thousands among the Protestants who content themselves with the external acts of going to church, hearing the Word, and “receiving the sacrament” once or twice a year. And when these duties are scrupulously observed, they imagine that all is well with them and think God is served sufficiently. Yea, let anyone set before them the real requirements of a thrice holy God and he will at once be sneered at by them as being too strict and precise, puritanical, and fanatical.

Since our Lord here condemned the fasting of the Pharisees because they rested in the outward work and did it ostentatiously for the praise of men, then how clear it is that the fasting of the Papists is an abomination in His sight, for theirs abounds with more numerous abuses. First, they

reduce the practice of fasting to a ludicrous farce, by allowing fish and eggs to take the place of meats and by placing no restriction at all upon wines and other strong drinks. Second, they bind men in conscience to numerous days of fasting and make the omission thereof a deadly sin, thereby taking away Christian liberty, for neither the Saviour nor any of His apostles appointed any set fast days. Third, they make fasting a meritorious performance, teaching that a man may thereby render satisfaction unto divine justice for his sins, whereby they blasphemously derogate from the sufficiency of Christ's obedience and sacrifice. How the godly should grieve at the spread of such wicked superstitions in our midst.

It should now be quite apparent that Christ did not here forbid all fasting as such, but was engaged in correcting the abuses of this ordinance. His words, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites" (Mat 6:16) not only take it for granted that His disciples would fast, but manifestly denote that the godly ought to do so, both in private and in public upon just occasion. Nay, if the Saviour here rebukes the Pharisees for their perversion of this holy means of grace, then much more must He blame those who fast not at all. This is not a thing indifferent, left to our option, but something which God requires from us, and for the absence of which He may often increase His judgments (Isa 22:12-14).

Enough has already been before us to show that God has given us many inducements to stir up our hearts to engage in this exercise. There is the worthy precedent of many holy men in the past who carefully performed this duty when occasion offered, such as David, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In like manner we have the recorded examples in the New Testament of the Saviour Himself (Mat 4:2), Anna, Cornelius, the apostles and elders of the churches. Moreover we have among us pressing occasions of fasting, both in public and in private. The present state of God's cause upon earth, the withdrawal of the Spirit's unction and blessing, the drying up of the streams of vital godliness, the lack of fruit from the preaching of the Gospel, the abounding of error on every side, the rising tide of infidelity, iniquity and immorality—above all, the national judgments of God now hanging over our heads, call loudly for humiliation, afflicting of our souls, and repentance.

"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret" (Mat 6:17-18). This statement is not to be taken absolutely and literally, but relatively and figuratively. These words of Christ must be understood in the light of their setting, their scope being quite apparent from the context. In Oriental countries, where the air is hot and dry, it is the common custom to anoint the head and face with oil and ointments, which are there plentiful and cheap, Ruth 3:3; Luke 7:46, etc.—"oil to make the face to shine" (Psa 104:15). That Christ is not to be here understood literally appears from His scope. He was off-setting the Pharisees' practice of disfiguring their faces. Second, from the fact that He does not here command contraries—the use of such things in fasting as are more appropriate for feasting, for the anointing of the face is indicative of cheerfulness and joy.

The obvious meaning of Christ in the above words is—when you engage in a private fast, so conduct yourself as it may not appear unto men that you are so engaged. Fasting is unto God, and our one and only concern must be to perform this duty in a manner which is pleasing unto Him. So far from parading this duty before men, we must take every possible precaution to conceal our private devotions from them. If we are to enter our chambers and shut the door when engaging in private prayer, equally necessary is it that we observe the utmost secrecy in connection with our private fasting. Everything which savours of pride and ostentation is to be rigidly eschewed. Whenever we devote a portion of our time to extraordinary private devotions, there should be

nothing in our deportment or general appearance to indicate this unto others. So far from any show of our religious feelings, we should do all we can to hide them from the notice of others.

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast” (Mat 6:17-18). “This exhortation certainly does not mean that, on these occasions men should assume a cheerfulness they do not feel, but that there should be nothing in the dress or in the appearance calculated to attract notice. That there should be no abatement in the ordinary attention to cleanliness of person or propriety of apparel, and that, when having brought the solemn services of the closet to a termination, they go out to society, there should be nothing to tell the world how they have been engaged” (John Brown, 1784-1858). The great thing to remember and be concerned about is that it is with God we have to do, and not with men. It is with Him our hearts are to be occupied, it is unto Him we are praying and fasting, it is before Him we are to unburden ourselves. It is His pardon and favour we are soliciting. The opinion and esteem of fellow-mortals fades into utter insignificance before the approval and reward of our heavenly Father.

“When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face” (Mat 6:17). In these instructions we are also taught that Christ requires us to take due care of our bodies. There are two extremes to be avoided—undue pampering and the careless neglecting of them—the former presenting the more real danger in this effeminate age. Any species of gluttony and intemperance is sinful, for it dulls the mind, stimulates our lusts, and leads to further evil. Such excesses are forbidden in, “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). On the other hand, we are warned against the “neglecting of the body” (Col 2:23) under the pretence of honouring the soul. Anything which produces weakness and disability is to be avoided. That care of the body which God requires is a moderate concern for its needs, a temperate use of food so as to fit it for the discharge of duty.

In the above words of Christ, we may also perceive that it is a Christian duty to preserve a cheerful countenance. While on the one hand, we must eschew all carnal frivolity and lightness, manifesting a habitual seriousness and sobriety, yet on the other hand, we must see to it that we carefully avoid everything which savours of an affected solemnity and melancholy. If we are bidden to guard against any external displays of grief while engaged in those religious exercises which from their very nature tend to sadden the countenance, then most certainly it is our duty to manifest in our general deportment the natural symptoms of a cheerful and contented mind.

It is our duty to refute the world’s lie that Christianity is incapable of making its subjects happy. Few things have done more injury to the calls of the Gospel than the sourness, sadness, and moroseness of a large class of its professors. Where Christ rules in the heart, He sheds abroad a peace which passes all understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. True, we must not pretend a peace and joy we do not possess, yet we should be most diligent in opening our hearts unto the influences of that truth which we profess to believe. God’s commands are not grievous and in keeping of them there is great reward. Let us seek to make it evident to those around us that Christ’s yoke is not a hard one nor His burden heavy. Let us make it appear that the truth has not made us slaves, but free, and that wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness.

“But unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:18). These words contain a warning against the one-sided idea of dispensationalists that Christ will be the sole Judge and Rewarder—a concept which is plainly refuted by such a passage as Hebrews 12:23. It is just as erroneous to restrict the judicial office to the Son as to exclude the Father and the Spirit (Job 33:4, etc.) from the work of creation. The

truth is that, with regard to deliberation, authority, and consent, the final judgment shall be determined by the whole Trinity, yet with regard to immediate execution by Christ.

We cannot do better than conclude these remarks by quoting from Calvin (John, 1509-1564). “It were far better that fasting should be entirely disused than that the practice should be diligently observed, and at the same time corrupted with false opinions, into which the world is continually falling, unless it be presented by the greatest fidelity of the pastors. The first caution necessary is, ‘Rend your heart, and not your garments’ (Joe 2:13)—that is, God sets no value on fasting unless it be accompanied with a correspondent disposition of heart, a real displeasure against sin, sincere self-abhorrence, true humiliation, and unfeigned grief—and fasting is of no use of any other account than as an additional and subordinate assistance to these things.”

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### *11. At Zarephath*

We are now to consider one of the most remarkable incidents recorded in the Old Testament, namely, the restoring to life of the widow’s son at Zarephath. It is an incident staggering to unbelief, yet he who has any experimental acquaintance with the Lord finds no difficulty therein. When Paul was making his defense before Agrippa, the apostle asked him, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you [not simply that a deceased person should be restored to life, but], that God should raise the dead?” (Act 26:8). Ah, there is where the believer throws all the emphasis—upon the absolute sufficiency of the One with whom he has to do. Bring into the scene the living God, and no matter how drastic and desperate be the situation, all difficulties at once disappear, for nothing is impossible to Him. He who first implanted life, He who now holds our souls in life (Psa 66:9), can revivify the dead.

The modern infidel (like the Sadducees of old) may scoff at the divinely revealed truth of resurrection, but not so the Christian. And why? Because he has experienced in his own soul the quickening power of God. He has been brought from death unto life spiritually. Even though Satan should inject vile doubts into his mind, and for awhile shake his confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, yet he will soon recover his poise. He knows the blessedness of that grand verity, and when grace has again delivered him from the power of darkness, he will joyfully exclaim with the apostle, “Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). Moreover, when he was born again, a supernatural principle was planted within his heart—the principle of faith—and that principle causes him to receive the Holy Scriptures with full assurance that they are indeed the Word of Him that cannot lie, and therefore does he believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Here is the reason why that which staggers and stumbles the wise of this world is plain and simple to the Christian. The preservation of Noah and his family in the ark, Israel’s passing through the Red Sea dry-shod, the survival of Jonah in the whale’s belly, present no difficulty to him at all. He knows that the Word of God is inerrant, for the truth thereof has been verified in his own experience. Having proved for himself that the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16), he has no reason to doubt anything recorded in Holy Writ concerning the prodigies of His might in the material realm. The believer is fully assured that nothing is too hard for the Maker of heaven and earth. It is not that he is an intellectual simpleton, credulously accepting what is altogether contrary to reason, but that in the Christian reason is restored to its

normal functioning—predicate a God who is almighty, and the supernatural workings of His hand necessarily follows.

The entire subject of miracles is hereby reduced to its simplest factor. A great deal of learned jargon has been written on this theme—the laws of nature, their suspension, God’s acting contrary thereto, and as to the precise nature of a miracle. Personally we would define a miracle as something which none but God Himself can perform. In so doing, we are not underestimating the powers possessed by Satan, or overlooking such passages as Revelation 16:14 and 19:20. It is sufficient for the writer that Holy Writ affirms the Lord to be, “Him who alone doeth great wonders” (Psa 136:4). As for the “great signs and wonders” shown by false Christs and false prophets, their nature and design is to “deceive” (Mat 24:24), for they are “lying wonders” (2Th 2:9), just as their predictions are false ones. Here we rest—God alone does great wonders, and being GOD this is just what faith expects from Him.

Last month, we were occupied with the sore affliction which came upon the Zarephath widow in the sudden death of her son and the immediate effect which it had upon her. Stirred to the depths, she turned to Elijah and accused him of being the occasion of her heavy loss. The prophet made no harsh reply to the unkind and unjust charge, but instead, quietly said, “Give me thy son” (1Ki 17:19). Observe that he did not autocratically lay hands upon the corpse, but courteously requested that the body should be turned over to him. We believe that Elijah’s design therein was to still her passion and cause her to “against hope believed in hope” (Rom 4:18), as long before Abraham had done, when he “believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead,” for it was (in part) in response to her faith that she “received her dead raised to life again” (Heb 11:35).

“And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed” (1Ki 17:19). This was evidently an upper room reserved for the prophet’s personal use, as Elisha had his in another place (2Ki 4:10). There he now retired for privacy, as Peter to the house-top and Christ into the garden. The prophet himself must have been quite oppressed and disconcerted by the sad event which had overtaken his hostess. Stern as Elijah might be in the discharge of duty, yet he possessed a tender spirit underneath (as such stern men generally do), full of benignity and sensitive to the misery of others. It is quite evident from the sequel Elijah grieved that one who had been so kind to him should be so heavily afflicted since he had come to her hospitable abode, and it would add to his distress that she should think he was responsible for her loss.

It must not be lost sight of that this dark dispensation occasioned a very real testing of Elijah’s faith. JEHOVAH is the God of the widow and the Re-rarder of those who befriend His people, especially of those who show kindness to His servants. Why, then, should such evil now come upon the one who was affording him shelter? Had he not come by the Lord’s own appointment as a messenger of mercy to her house? True, he had proved himself to be such, but this was forgotten by her under the stress of the present trial, for he is now regarded as the emissary of wrath, an avenger of her sin, the slayer of her only child. Worst of all, would he not feel that the honour of his Master was also involved? That the name of the Lord would be scandalized? Might the widow not ask, Is this how God repays those who befriend His servants?

Blessed is it to observe how Elijah reacted to this trial. When the widow asked if the death of her son was due to his presence, he indulged in no carnal speculations, making no attempt to solve the deep mystery which now confronted himself as well as her. Instead, he retires to his chamber that he may get alone with God and spread his perplexity before Him. This is ever the course we should follow, for not only is the Lord “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1), but His Word requires that we should seek unto Him first, “My soul, wait thou only upon God” (Psa

62:5), applies with double force in times of perplexity and distress. Vain is the help of man—worthless are carnal conjectures. In the hour of His acutest trial, the Saviour Himself withdrew from His own disciples and poured out His heart unto the Father in secret. The widow was not allowed to witness the deepest exercises of the prophet’s soul before his Master.

“And he cried unto the LORD” (1Ki 17:20). As yet Elijah apprehended not the meaning of this mystery, but he well-understood what to do in his difficulty. He betook himself unto his God and spread his complaint before Him. He sought relief with great earnestness and importunity, humbly reasoning with Him regarding the death of the child. But note well his reverent language. He did not ask, Why hast Thou inflicted this dismal dispensation upon us? But instead, “O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?” (1Ki 17:20). The why of it was none of his business. It is not for us to call into question the ways of the Most High nor to curiously inquire into His secret counsels. Sufficient for us to know that the Lord makes no mistakes, that He has a good and sufficient reason for all He does, and therefore should we meekly submit to His sovereign pleasure. Man’s “Why doth he” and “Why hast thou”? is designated a “replying against God” (Rom 9:19-20).

In Elijah’s address unto God we may note, first, how that he fell back upon the special relation which He sustained to him, “O LORD my God” (1Ki 17:20), he cried. This was a pleading of his personal interest in God, for these words are always expressive of covenant relationship. To be able to say, “O LORD my God,” is worth more than gold or rubies. Second, he traced the calamity back to its original source, “Hast thou also brought evil upon the widow?” (1Ki 17:20)—he saw death striking by divine commission, “Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it!” (Amo 3:6). What a comfort when we are enabled to realize that no evil can befall God’s children but such as He brings upon them. Third, he pleaded the severity of the affliction. This evil has come upon, not simply the woman nor even the mother, but “the widow” whom Thou dost specially succour. Moreover, she it is “with whom I sojourn”—my kind benefactor.

“And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD” (1Ki 17:21). Was this proof of the prophet’s humility? How remarkable that so great a man should spend so much time and thought on that slender form, and bring himself into immediate contact with that which was ceremonially defiled! Was this act indicative of his own affection for the child and to show how deeply he was stirred by his death? Was it a token of the fervency of his appeal unto God, as though he would if he could put life into his body from the life and warmth of his own? Does not his doing this three times over so intimate? Was it a sign of what God would do by His power and accomplish by His grace in the bringing of sinners from death unto life—the Holy Spirit overshadowing them and imparting His own life to them! If so, is there not more than a hint here that those whom He employs as instruments in conversion must themselves become as little children, bringing themselves to the level of those to whom they minister, and not standing on a pedestal as though they were superior beings?

“Cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again” (1Ki 17:21). What a proof is this that Elijah was accustomed to expect wondrous blessings from God in response to his supplications, accounting that nothing was too hard for Him to do, nothing too great for Him to bestow in answer to prayer. Undoubtedly this petition was prompted by the Holy Spirit, yet it was a marvelous effect of the prophet’s faith to anticipate the restoration of the child to life, for there is no record in Scripture that anyone had been raised from the dead before this time. And remember, Christian reader, that this is recorded for our instruction and encouragement—the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. At

the throne of grace we approach unto a great King, so let us large petitions bring. The more faith counts upon the infinite power and sufficiency of the Lord, the more is He honoured.

“And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1Ki 17:22). What a proof was this that “the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers” (1Pe 3:12). What a demonstration of the potency and efficacy of prayer! Ours is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God—to Him therefore let us have recourse whatever be our distress. Hopeless as our case may be to all human help, yet nothing is too hard for the Lord. He is able to do far more exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. But let us “ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (Jam 1:6-7). “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14). Surely we have need, all of us, to cry more earnestly, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1). Unless this be one of the effects produced by pondering the incident now before us, our study of the same has availed us little.

But it is not sufficient for us to cry, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luk 11:1), we must also carefully ponder those portions of His Word which chronicle cases of prevailing intercession, that we may learn the secrets of successful prayer. In this instance, we may note the following points. First, Elijah’s retiring to his own private chamber, that he might be alone with God. Second, his fervency—he “cried unto the LORD” (1Ki 17:21)—no mere lip-service was this. Third, his reliance upon his own personal interest in the Lord, avowing his covenant relationship, “O LORD, my God” (1Ki 17:20). Fourth, his encouraging himself in God’s attributes—here, the divine sovereignty and supremacy, “Hast thou also brought evil upon the widow” (1Ki 17:20). Fifth, his earnestness and importunity, evidenced by his “stretching himself upon the child” (see 1Ki 17:21), no less than three times. Sixth, his appeal to God’s tender mercy, “the widow with whom I sojourn” (1Ki 17:20). Finally, the definiteness of his petition, “Let this child’s soul come into him again” (1Ki 17:21).

“And the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1Ki 17:22). These words are important for clearly establishing the very definite distinction which there is between the soul and the body, a distinction as real as that which exists between the house and its inhabitant. Scripture tells us that in the day of his creation, the Lord God first formed man’s body out of “the dust of the ground,” and second, that He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” and only then did he become “a living soul” (Gen 2:7). The language employed on this occasion affords clear proof that the soul is distinct from the body, that it does not die with the body, that it exists in a separate state after the death of the body, and that none but God can restore it to its original habitat (compare Luke 8:55). Incidentally, we may observe that this request of Elijah’s and the Lord’s response make it quite clear that the child was actually dead.

Relatively speaking, though in a very real sense nevertheless, the age of miracles has ceased, so that we cannot expect to have our dead supernaturally restored to us in this life. Yet the Christian may and ought to look forward with certain assurance that he shall meet again those beloved relatives and friends who departed hence in Christ. Their spirits are not dead, nor even sleeping as some erroneously assert, but have returned to God who gave them (see Ecc 12:7) and are now in a state that is “far better” (Phi 1:23), which could not be were they deprived of all conscious communion with their Beloved. Their souls are not in “purgatory,” as sordid priests have pretended for filthy lucre’s sake, but being absent from the body, they are “present with the Lord” (2Co 5:8), and in His presence is “fulness of joy” (Psa 16:11). As to their bodies, they await that great day when they shall be fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body.

“And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth” (1Ki 17:23). What joy must have filled the prophet’s heart as he witnessed the miraculous answer to his intercession! What fervent ejaculations of praise must have issued from his lips unto God for this additional manifestation of His goodness in delivering him from his grief. But it was no time for delay—the sorrow and suspense of the poor widow must now be allayed. Elijah, therefore promptly took the child downstairs and gave him to his mother. Who can imagine her delight as she saw her child restored to life again? How the prophet’s procedure on this occasion reminds us of our Lord’s action following upon the miracle of restoring to life the only son of the widow of Nain, for no sooner did he sit up and speak than we are told that the Saviour “delivered him to his mother” (Luk 7:15)!

“And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth” (1Ki 17:24). Very blessed is this. Instead of giving vent to her natural emotions, she appears to have been entirely absorbed with the power of God which rested upon His servant, which now firmly established her conviction of his divine mission and assurance in the truth which he proclaimed. Full demonstration had been given her that Elijah was indeed a prophet of the Lord and that his witness was true. It must not be forgotten that in verse 14, he had first presented himself to her as a “man of God” (note her words in verse 18), and therefore it was essential he should establish his claim to that character. And this was done by the restoration of her child to life. Ah, my reader, we avow ourselves to be the children of the living God, but how are we making good our profession? There is only one conclusive way of so doing, and that is by walking in “newness of life” (Rom 6:4), evidencing that we are new creatures in Christ.

In closing, let us observe how that which has been before us supplies yet another feature of Elijah’s domestic life. In considering how he conducted himself in the widow’s home, we noted first his contentment, murmuring not at the humble fare which was placed before him. Second, his gentleness, in refusing to reply to her unkind words with an angry retort. And now we behold the blessed effect upon his hostess of the miracle wrought in answer to his prayers. Her confession, “By this I know thou art a man of God” (1Ki 17:24), was a personal testimony to the reality and power of a holy life. O to live in the energy of the Holy Spirit so that those who come into contact with us may perceive the power of God working in and through us. Thus did the Lord override the widow’s grief unto her spiritual good, by establishing her faith in the veracity of His Word.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN’S IMPOTENCY**

### *5. Its Extent*

In the second half of last month’s article, we arrived at the most solemn and dreadful aspect of the subject we are here contemplating, namely, that the outstanding property of the “flesh” or indwelling sin consists of enmity against God Himself, and such enmity that, “It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). This frightful and implacable enmity is entire and universal, being opposed to all of God. If there were anything of God—His nature, His character, or His works—that indwelling corruption was not enmity against, then the soul might

have a retreat within itself where it could shelter and apply itself to that which is of God. But alas, such is the enmity of fallen man that it hates all that is of God, everything wherein or whereby we have to do with Him.

Sin is enmity against God, and therefore to all of God. It is enmity against His law and against His Gospel alike, against every duty unto Him, against any communion with Him. It is not only against His sovereignty, His holiness, His power, yea His grace, that sin rears its horrible head, but it abhors everything which is of or pertains to God. His commandments and His threats, His promises and His warnings are equally disliked. His providences are reviled and His dealings with the world blasphemed. And the nearer any-thing approaches to God, the greater is man's enmity against it. The more of spirituality and holiness is manifested in anything, the more the flesh rises up against it. That which is most of God meets with most opposition. "Ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof" (Pro 1:25) is the divine indictment. It is not merely some parts of God's counsel, but against the whole of it that the wicked heart of man is opposed.

Not only is this fearful enmity opposed to everything of God, but it is universal in all the soul. Had indwelling sin been content with a partial dominion, had it subjugated only a part of the soul, it might have been more easily and successfully opposed. But alas, this enmity against God has invaded and captured the entire territory of man's being. It has not left a single faculty of the soul free from its tyrannical yoke, it has not exempted a single member from its cruel bondage. When the Spirit of God comes with His gracious power to conquer the soul, He finds nothing whatever in the sinner's soul which is in sympathy with His operations, nothing that will "co operate" with Him—all within us is alike opposed to and strives against His working. There is not the faintest desire for deliverance within the unregenerate, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (Isa 1:5). Even when grace has made its entrance, yet sin still dwells in all its coasts.

Distasteful and humiliating as this truth may be we must dwell further upon it, and amplify what has just been boldly affirmed. Last month, we showed how this fearful enmity is evidenced by the judgments or concepts which men form of God. Sin has so perverted the human mind that the most distorted views and horrible ideas are entertained of the Deity. Nor is this all—sin has so inflated the creature that he deems himself competent to comprehend the incomprehensible. Filled with pride, he refuses to acknowledge his limitations and dependence, and in his flight after things which are far beyond his reach, indulges in the most impious speculations. When he cannot stretch himself to the infinite dimensions of truth, he deliberately contracts the truth to his own little measure. This is what the apostle meant by fallen man's "vanity of mind."

The natural man's enmity against God appears in his affections. As the superlatively excellent One, God has paramount claims upon man's heart. He should be the supreme object of his delight. But is He? Far, very far from it. The veriest trifles are held in greater esteem than is the Fountain of all true joy. The unregenerate see in Him no beauty as they should desire Him. When they hear of His sublime attributes, they dislike them. When they hear His Word quoted, it is repugnant to them. When invited to draw near unto His throne of grace, they have no inclination to do so. They have no desire for fellowship with God, yea, they had rather think and talk about anything rather than the Lord and His government. They secretly hate His people, and will only tolerate their presence so long as they conform to their wishes. The pleasures and baubles of this world entirely fill their hearts. Corrupted nature can never give birth to a single affection which is really spiritual.

The natural man's enmity appears in his will. Inevitably so, for God's will directly crosses his. God is infinitely holy, man is thoroughly evil and therefore He commands the things which they

hate and forbids the things they like. Hence it is that they despise His authority, refuse His yoke, rebel against His government, and go their own way. They have no concern for God's glory and no respect for His will. They will not hearken to His reproofs nor be checked in their defiant course by His most solemn threats. They are as intractable as the wild ass's colt. They are like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. They prate of the freedom of their wills, but the wills are ever active against God and never toward Him. They are determined to have their own way no matter what the cost. When Christ is set before them, they will not come to Him that they might have life. Sooner will water flow uphill of its own accord than the will of man incline itself unto God.

The enmity of the natural man against God appears in his conscience. Because he is anxious to be at peace with himself in the reflections which he makes upon his own life and character, it is obvious that an accusing conscience must be a perpetual source of false representations of God. When guilt rankles in the breast, man will blaspheme the justice of his Judge, and self-love prompts him to stigmatize the punishment of himself as remorseless cruelty. A guilty conscience unwilling to relinquish its iniquities and yet desirous of being delivered from fears of punishment, prompts men to represent Deity as subject to the weakness and follies of humanity. God is to be flattered and bribed with external marks of submission and esteem, or else insulted as the worshipper regards Him as cruel. Conscience fills the mind with prejudices against the nature and character of God, as a human insult fills our heart with prejudice against the one who mortifies our self-respect. Conscience cannot judge lightly of One whom it hates and dreads.

The enmity of the natural man against God evidences itself in his practice. This dreadful hatred of God is not a passive thing, but an active principle. Sinners are engaged in actual warfare against their Maker. They have enlisted under the banner of Satan, and they deliberately oppose and defy the Lord. They scoff at His Word, disregard His precepts, flout His providences, resist His Spirit, and turn a deaf ear to the expostulations of His servants. Their hearts are fully set in them to do wickedness. "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:13-18). There is in every sinner a deeply-rooted aversion for God, a seed of malice. While God leaves them alone, their malice may not be clearly revealed, but let them feel but a little of His wrath upon them and their hatred is swiftly manifest.

The sinner's enmity against God is unmixed with any love at all. The natural man is utterly devoid of the principle of love for God. As Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) solemnly expressed it, "The heart of the sinner is as devoid of love for God as a corpse is of vital heat." As the Lord Jesus expressly declared, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (Joh 5:42). And mark it well, that fearful indictment was made by One who could infallibly read the human heart. Moreover that indictment was passed not upon the openly vicious and profane, but upon the strictest religionists of His day. O my reader, you may have a mild temper, an amiable disposition, a reputation for kindness and generosity, but if you have never been born again you have no more real love in your heart for God than Judas had for the Saviour. What a frightful character—the unmitigated enemy of God!

The power of man's enmity against God is so great that nothing finite can break it. The sinner cannot break it himself. Should an unregenerate person read this article and be horrified at the hideous picture which it presents of himself, and should he earnestly resolve to cease his vile enmity against God, he cannot do so. He can no more change his nature than the Ethiopian can change the colour of his skin. No preacher can persuade him to throw down the weapons of his

rebellion and become the friend of God. He may set before you the excellence of the divine character, he may plead with you to be reconciled to God, but your heart will remain as steeled against Him as ever. Even though God Himself works miracles in the sight of sinners it effects no change in their hearts. Pharaoh's enmity was not overcome by the most astonishing displays of divine power, nor was that of the dwellers of Palestine in Christ's day.

It is with indwelling sin as with a powerful and swiftly-flowing river. So long as its tributaries are open and waters continually supplied unto its streams—though a dam be set up—yet its waters rise and swell until it bears down all and overflows the banks about it. Thus it is with the enmity of the carnal mind against God. While its springs and fountains remain open, it is utterly vain for man to set a dam before it by his convictions and resolutions, promises and penances, vows and self-efforts. They may check it for awhile but it will rise up and rage until sooner or later it bears down all those convictions and resolutions, or makes for itself an underground passage by some secret lust which will give full vent unto it. The springs thereof must be subdued by regenerating grace, the streams or actings abated by holiness or the soul will be drowned and destroyed. Even after regeneration, indwelling sin gives the soul no rest, but constantly wages war upon it.

The Christian is, in fact, the only man who is conscious of the awful power and ragings of this principle of enmity. How often is he made aware that when he would do good, evil is present with him, opposing every effort he makes Godwards. How often when his soul is doing quite another thing, engaged in a totally different design, sin starts in his heart or imagination which carries it away unto that which is evil. Yea, the soul may be seriously engaged in the mortification of sin, when indwelling corruption will by some means or other lead it away unto a dalliance with the very sin which it is endeavouring to slay. Such surprises as these are so many proofs of the habitual propensity unto evil of that principle of enmity against God from which they proceed. It is the ever-abiding presence, the continual operation of this principle which prevents much communion with God, disturbs holy meditations, and defiles the conscience.

But to return unto our consideration of the enmity of the unregenerate. This enmity in the heart of the sinner is so great that he is God's mortal enemy. Now a man may be no friend to another, yea he may cherish ill-will against a fellow creature, and yet not be his mortal enemy. That is to say, his enmity against him is not so great that nothing else will satisfy him but the death of the one he hates. But it is far otherwise with sinners and God—they are His mortal enemies. It is true that it lies not in the power of their hands to kill Him, yet the desire is there in the heart. There is a principle of enmity within fallen man which would rejoice if Deity could be annihilated. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psa 14:1). Observe well that the words "there is" are in italics—supplied by the translators, to signify an expression of atheism. But read as the original has it, "The fool has said in his heart no God"—it is not the denying of His existence, but the affirmation that he desires no communication with Him—I desire no God—would that He did not exist.

Here is the frightful climax—the carnal mind is enmity with the very being of God. Sin is destructive of all being. Man is a suicide—he has destroyed himself. He is a homicide—his evil influence destroys his fellows. He is a Deicide—he wishes he could annihilate the very being of God. But sinners do not regard themselves as being so vile. They do not consider themselves to be the implacable and inveterate enemies of God. No, they have far better opinion of themselves than that. Consequently, if they hear or read anything like this article, they are filled with objections. "I do not believe I am such a dreadful creature as to hate God, I do not feel such enmity in my heart. I am not conscious that I harbour any ill-will against Him. Who should know

better than myself? If I hate a fellow creature I am aware of it. How then could I be totally unconscious if there dwells in my soul such enmity against God as you have depicted?

To these questions several answers may be returned. First, if the objector would seriously examine his heart and commune with himself, unless he were strangely blinded, he would certainly discover in himself those very elements in which enmity essentially consists. He loves and respects his friends. He is fond of their company, he is anxious to please them and promote their good. Is this his attitude toward God? If he is honest with himself, he knows it is not. He has no respect for His authority, no concern for His glory, no desire for fellowship with Him. He gives God none of his time, despises His Word, breaks His commandments, rejects His Son. He has been opposed to God all his life. These things are the very essence of enmity.

Second, the sinner's ignorance and unconsciousness of his enmity against God is due to the false conceptions which he entertains of His nature and character. If only he were better acquainted with the God of Holy Writ he would be more aware of his hatred of Him. But the God he believes in is merely a creation of his own fancy. The true God is ineffably holy, inflexibly just, whose wrath burns against sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. If mankind likes the true God, why is it that they have set up so many false gods? If they admire the truth, why have they invented so many false systems of religion? The contrariety between the carnal mind and God is the contrariety there is between sin and holiness. The divine law requires man to love God supremely—instead, he loves himself supremely. It requires him to delight in God superlatively—instead, he wholly delights in all that is not of God. It requires him to love his neighbour as himself—instead, his heart is inordinately selfish.

Third, above we have said that the enmity of the natural man against God is a mortal one. This the sinner will not allow. But indubitable proof of our assertion is found in man's treatment of God when, in the person of His Son, He became incarnate. When God brought Himself as near to man as Infinity could approach, men saw in Him "no beauty" (Isa 53:2) that they should desire Him, rather was He despised and rejected by them. Not only did they disesteem Him, but they hated Him "without a cause" (Psa 69:4). So bitter and relentless was their hatred that they exclaimed, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him" (Mat 21:38). And what form of death did they select for Him? The most painful and shameful their malignity could devise. And the Son of God is still despised and rejected. Forget not His words, "He that hateth me hateth my Father also" (Joh 15:23), and our proof is complete.

Does someone ask, What bearing has this lengthy dissertation on man's enmity upon the subject in hand? Why take up the total depravity of fallen man when you are supposed to be treating of his spiritual impotency? Ah, my friend, we have not wandered from our theme at all. Instead, while dealing with the root and extent of man's impotency we have followed strictly the order of Scripture. What is the very next word of the apostle's after Romans 8:7? Why this, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." It is just because man is corrupt at the very center of his being, because indwelling sin is a law over him, because his mind (the noblest part of his being) is enmity against God, that he is completely incapable of doing anything to meet with the divine approbation.

Here is the inevitable inference, the inescapable conclusion. "So then"—because fallen man's mind is enmity with God and incapable of subordination to His law—"they that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom 8:8). And be it said that to be "in the flesh" is not necessarily to be immoral, for there is the religiousness as well as the irreligiousness of the flesh. So great, so entire, so irremediable is this impotency of fallen man that he is unable to effect any change in his nature, acquire any strength by his own efforts, prepare himself to receive divine grace, until the

Spirit renews him and works in him both to will and to do of God's good pleasure. He is unable to discern spiritual things (1Co 2:14), incapable of believing (Joh 8:47), powerless to obey (Rom 8:7). He cannot think a good thought of himself (2Co 3:5), he cannot speak a good word (Mat 5:44), yea, without Christ he "can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). Thus, the sinner is "without strength," wholly impotent, and unable to turn himself unto God.

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD

We come now to consider, third, its manifestation. But let us make it unmistakably clear at the outset that it is the manifestation of God's justice under the economy which He has instituted which we shall here treat of. It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that there is a vast difference between the justice of God when it be viewed absolutely and when it be viewed relatively—a difference as real and as great as that which exists between His essential independence and those restrictions which He has voluntarily assumed. The justice of God considered absolutely consists of His own divine rights to do whatever He pleases. The justice of God considered relatively consists of His course of action in relation to those creatures which He has placed under a moral constitution, wherein He has pledged Himself unto a certain order of procedure.

This distinction is far more than a metaphysical nicety—it is a basic fact. The great God was absolutely free to create or not create, just as He saw fit. There was no compulsion—either from within or without—for Him to bring creatures into existence. He decided to go forth into acts of creation solely for His own glory. In like manner, God was entirely free to create whatever kind of creatures He pleased. It was solely for Him to determine whether they should be rational entities or not. So, too, it was for Him to decide whether or not evil should enter His universe and sin mar the works of His hands. Furthermore, it was entirely at His option whether He should promptly annihilate evil-doers or whether their existence should be prolonged. And if prolonged, whether their iniquities should be pardoned or punished, and if punished in what way and for how long. Alas, how ignorant this generation is of Holy Writ!

Absolutely considered, then, the justice of God is one with His sovereignty—that is to say, whatever God decrees and whatever He does is just, simply and solely because it issues from His own imperial will. But relatively considered, the justice of God consists in His administering with strict impartiality the law which He was pleased to frame, so that He gives to each under it his exact due. Above, we made mention of those "restrictions" which God has voluntarily taken upon Himself. Lest this be misunderstood or wrested, we hasten to define our meaning. It has pleased God to form a purpose or plan, the broad outlines of which are revealed in His Word, and He is now acting accordingly. It has pleased God to make certain promises and threats, and He has pledged Himself to fulfill the same. We shall, then, now contemplate the divine justice as it is manifested under that economy which the Lord God has appointed.

First, it is testified to by our conscience. Since it pleased the Creator to constitute man a rational creature and to place him under external law, He also saw fit to afford proof within himself that he is subject to a government which is righteous and just. Man is not only endowed with a faculty which enables him to distinguish between right and wrong, but with perceptions that intuitively feel that justice is worthy of approbation and injustice of condemnation. This is a part of that "work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom 2:15) by the Maker of men. It is in consequence of this moral faculty that the wicked "knowing [within themselves] the judgment of

God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32). Hence it is that from earliest times and all through the centuries the most benighted even of the heathen have resorted unto all manner of means and devices in seeking to placate deity.

It is the province of our conscience to weigh actions in the scales of God’s law (or what we apprehend to be His law) and pass sentence according to their conformity or lack of conformity with that standard. It has rightly been termed the deputy or vicegerent of God within our souls, for it performs not only the work of a monitor by reminding us of our duty and exciting us to attend unto the same, but also of a subordinate judge summoning us before its tribunal and pronouncing us innocent or guilty. Its sentences proceed on the assumption that God’s law is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12), with the demands of which we are bound to comply. And as Romans 2 tells us, this moral faculty obtains as truly in those who receive not the written law of God as in those who do. Thus we see how the creature bears within him a witness to the attributes of God’s justice, for the constitution of his mind is as much His work as is the balancing of the clouds.

The workings of conscience are indeed remarkable, for they often expose the vanity of our most specious pretenses and convict us of sin at the moment when we are employing all our sophistry in seeking to justify our mad conduct. In this manner, the rights of God as the Supreme Governor to place man under law and to enforce its sanctions are manifested within him even amid his very attempts to repudiate His demands and escape from His yoke. This advocate for God’s claims accompanies us wherever we go and makes its voice heard in solitude and company alike. It upbraids those whom men would never think of reproving, and speaks with such potency as makes kings to tremble upon their thrones. It checks us when we are meditating wicked devices, and if unheeded, disturbs our pleasure while we are seeking to enjoy our unlawful spoils.

Second, the dispensations of Providence tend to confirm the dictates of conscience and manifest the justice of Him who is Lord over all. Providence supposes the preservation of creatures and the government of them according to their respective natures. Are there, then, any indications of a moral government over men? Both experience and observation inform us that good and evil are disbursed, and the point we now raise is, do these appear to be allotted unto men in any degree according to their conduct considered as morally good or evil? Admittedly this is no question which is easy to answer to the satisfaction of many people, especially when they are in a gloomy mood—nevertheless, the Scriptures record so many examples of the justice of God in punishing sin and in rewarding righteousness that the godly cannot doubt the reality of this principle.

Among the more conspicuous demonstrations of the retributive justice of God, we mention the sparing not of the angels that sinned, for God “cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2Pe 2:4); the swallowing of the inhabitants of the old world by the flood; the overthrow of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; the destruction of the haughty Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea; and the calamities which befell the rebellious Jews, particularly their transportation to Babylon, and their subsequent dispersion by the Romans. Secular history also records many striking and solemn demonstrations of God taking vengeance on those who oppressed His people. Instances of divine intervention in the lives of nations may still be observed, and will not be overlooked by those who are attentive unto what is passing around them and who piously believe that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without the permission of the Most High.

The like retributive justice of God appears also in the case of individuals. When the Israelites caught the Canaanite Adonibezek and cut off his thumbs and his big toes, he acknowledged, “Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat

under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me” (Jdg 1:7). Ahab’s blood was lapped up by dogs in the very place where the blood of Naboth had been shed (1Ki 22:37-38). Jezebel was more guilty than he—Ahab permitted, but Jezebel contrived. Ahab afterward humbled himself, and therefore received honourable burial, but Jezebel was entombed in the bellies of the dogs. Haman was executed on the very gallows which he had set up for Mordecai (Est 7:10). Henry the Third of France was killed in the same chamber where the horrible massacre had been planned, and Charles the Ninth died flowing in his own blood in bed.

So plainly does Providence hint that the Ruler of this world is endowed with justice that we find heathen antiquity uniting in acknowledging its belief in divine retribution upon all enormities. Examples of this are found in the mariners who manned the ship in which Jonah was passenger, for they were convinced that the awful storm came upon them because of some evil-doer in their midst (Jon 1:7). As also in the case of the inhabitants of Melita, for when they saw the viper settle upon the hand of Paul they exclaimed, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live” (Act 28:4). Indeed it will generally be found that the heathen are far readier to consider the workings of divine retribution than are those nations which profess to be Christian, and that unbelievers today are more ready to own God’s hand in justice than most of those who claim to be believers.

This principle of divine retribution appears also in the lives of God’s own people. Jacob secured Isaac’s blessing by a piece of deception, posing as his brother Esau, and after seven years of hard service with Laban, the homely Leah was palmed off on him in the stead of her beautiful sister Rachel. When Joseph was inflexible to his brethren’s requests they exclaimed, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Gen 42:21). Asa, who put the prophet in stocks, afterward became diseased in his own feet. Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen, yea, assisted in his execution, for his murderers laid down their clothes at his feet. And therefore Paul himself was afterward stoned and left for dead (Act 14:19-20)—this is the more noteworthy because Barnabas, who was his companion—who had given equal offense in preaching the Gospel was not stoned.

And so it is still. Without being guilty of the presumption and uncharitableness which our Saviour condemned when speaking of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, and of the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell, yet there are times when we are constrained to acknowledge, “Verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psa 58:11). When we see, as at times we do, the sins of men called to remembrance by the very nature of their punishment, and when we occasionally behold the sinner smitten with the rod of anger while he is in the act of transgression, we cannot doubt that the Ruler of this world is our righteous judge. But it may be objected that the distribution of rewards and punishments is not regular or uniform, that upon the whole, the treatment which men receive from Providence is little connected with their character and conduct, yea, that the wicked rather than the righteous are the more successful.

The prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous have in all ages presented an acute problem, and it was the observation of Job that, “The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure” (Job 12:6). David declared, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree” (Psa 37:35). Asaph lamented, “I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Psa 73:3-5). After declaring, “Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee,” Jeremiah asked the Lord, “Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they

happy that deal very treacherously?” (Jer 12:1). Habakkuk also inquired, “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Hab 1:13). In Malachi’s days there were those who murmured, “It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance...They that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (Mal 3:14-15). What answer may be given to such questions?

First, God’s Word does sufficiently declare His displeasure against the wicked and His approbation of the righteous even though His providence does not. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11) Though the warrant is signed, yet the execution thereof may be suspended for just reasons. Sin is not the less odious to God because He does not immediately inflict its punishment. He delays it to display His infinite patience—bearing “with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:22). Some, like Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus, are spared, that they may become the monuments of His sovereign grace. So, too, God has wise reasons for delaying the rewards of the righteous, that faith may be tested, patience developed, and the sufficiency of His grace to sustain under afflictions demonstrated.

Second, it should be more definitely borne in mind that there are other punishments beside outward afflictions and other rewards beside material prosperity. Alas that we so readily forget this. Invisible judgments are the most fearful of all. To be abandoned by God unto blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and terrors of conscience, is far worse than any physical loss or pain! Who can measure what Cain felt when he cried, “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13)! Who can gauge the depths of remorse felt by Judas ere he went and hanged himself! Contrariwise, the favour of God is expressed unto His own people in the spiritual blessings which He showers upon them. What though the ungodly give them the cold shoulder, if they are conscious of the smile of their heavenly Father! Which is the better, houses and lands, or the comforts of an ungrieved Spirit and a peace which passes all understanding? Assurance of divine sonship is worth more than silver or gold!

Third, providence must not be viewed piecemeal, but in its entirety—nor by halves, but in its whole frame and connection. We are required to possess our souls in patience on this matter, too, for in His own good time God shall make it unmistakably plain to an assembled universe that He is a righteous Ruler and Judge. In the meanwhile, God has good reasons for not yet making a full demonstration of His justice by openly rewarding or punishing men according to their works. This is the day of His patience and not of His wrath—it is the day when we are called upon to walk by faith and not by sight. It is our failure to view providence as a whole which so often makes us say with Jacob, “All these things are against me” (Gen 42:36), when in reality, “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom 8:28). But it will only be in the future that this grand fact will be fully evidenced. “Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12), and what an immeasurable difference this will make!

Fourth, the solemn triumph of the justice of God will fully appear in the day to come. The righteous and the wicked receive but the beginnings of their reward and punishment in this life. Though the wicked are not altogether without punishment yet these are but the beginning of sorrows, if we respect either God’s external or eternal retribution. The reason for this is not hard to discover—if God should punish no sin here, then none would believe there is a God—if He should punish all sin here, none would be afraid of future judgment. “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Act 17:31)—that will be the grand assize for

all mankind, where the Great Judge shall appear in His royalty. At present God keeps but petty sessions, but then will be, "The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom 2:5). Now God's judgment is manifested on a few here and there, but then upon all. Now much of His retribution is disbursed secretly, but then openly. Now the punishment is but a temporary one, but then eternal. So, too, with the rewarding of the righteous. Here they have but the beginning of their salvation, the fulness thereof being reserved for the world to come, for here, too, we have to walk by faith and not by sight.

Finally, let us point out once more that under the dispensations of providence the external government of God is so exercised as to provide the world with a sufficient witness of His retributive justice as to give plain warning of what may be expected in the world to come. The occasional instance which we behold of the divine vengeance upon evildoers are notices that the Ruler of this world is not unmindful of nor indifferent to the actions of His creatures, and they are calculated to excite an expectation that in the future God's justice will be more openly and fully displayed. divine indifference cannot be fairly inferred from the afflictions of the righteous, since they are compensated for by those spiritual consolations which make them joyful in tribulation and are productive of salutary effects. Here justice is mingled with mercy to the godly in their sufferings, and mercy is mixed with justice to the wicked in their temporal blessings. But at the last day it will be fully demonstrated that God is a righteous Judge, keeping strictly to that law which He has framed for the government of this world. Moreover, at that day even the wicked shall be sufficiently delivered from the delusions of Satan as to perceive the righteousness of their Judge in His dealings with them.

## **DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

The providence of God in His government of the world is a subject of the deepest interest to the Christian. By proper views of it he will see God in the daily works of His hands. Philosophy, falsely so called, and the depravity of the human heart, make a veil of the physical laws by which God usually conducts His government, which hides God in His own works. But truth and Scripture represent all physical laws as having their effect from the immediate agency of almighty power, and view God as working in His providence as truly as He wrought in His works of creation. Christians themselves, though they recognize the doctrine, are prone to overlook it in practice, and consequently to be deprived, in a great measure, of that advantage which constant and deep impression of this truth is calculated to give. An exhibition, then, of the Scriptural evidence of the providence of God must be of great importance in the stability and comfort of all true believers.

There is nothing that grieves the Christian more sensibly than the introduction and progress of error in religion. Against this he ought to contend earnestly at every risk. He ought not to be ashamed of any part of the divine testimony with the knowledge of which God has honoured him, nor to seek the praise of men by concealing or modifying God's truth. But in doing this he will be greatly supported if he considers that it is the will of God that heresies shall enter and pervert many. When he has nailed his colours to the mast, and sinks with his ship, he can have the satisfaction of knowing that his Commander will ultimately have the victory, and that even the partial damage which the enemy has been enabled to inflict was a part of the purpose of his sovereign Lord and Master. Without this view of divine providence, I cannot see any consolation for the Christian on considering the ravages of error. Philosophy combines with fanaticism,

superstition with idolatry to oppose the Lord's Anointed. The only comfort is that the omnipotent Lord reigns and even by opposers does His pleasure. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision: He will be honoured even in the wrath of his enemies."

Nothing has a greater effect in leading Christians into error than success. Men in general judge a cause by its success, and Christians, though they do not recognize it as evidence, yet are often greatly influenced by it. Opinions spread by infection, rather than by a thorough investigation of the evidence. An accurate acquaintance with the ways of providence, as manifested in Scripture, is calculated to deliver from this prejudice. In the Bible we see that God has often granted much success to His enemies. By this they are hardened in their rebellion. Mere success is no proof of truth and the want of it no proof of error.

A proper acquaintance with the doctrine of providence would also be of importance to guard us from having recourse to artifice and craft in the propagation of truth. The apostle Paul, with all his zeal for the Gospel, disclaims all worldly wisdom in his attempts to advance his progress. He commended the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Let us use the means which God has appointed. But if Christianity were in danger of being banished from the earth, let us not attempt to assist it by fraud or means that are dishonourable. Let us fight the battles of the Lord with the weapons which He has put into our hands, but let us never support truth with sophistry. Leave the event of success to the General. All the ingenuity of all the wise men of the world could not extend the Gospel one inch beyond the limits assigned by God.

It is often afflicting to the Christian to consider the signs of the times in which he lives. Hitherto the affairs of this world have been under the dominion of the prince of darkness. But in the subject of providence we have consolation. We know that the very opposition made to the kingdom of Christ is a part of the plan of divine wisdom, and will be overruled for the glory of God and of our Immanuel. God has given the world into the dominion of Satan, but not in such a sense as to exclude Himself from the government. The wrath of Satan, as well as the wrath of man, will be obliged to praise God, and any devise of it which has not this tendency JEHOVAH will restrain and not suffer to be manifested.—Alexander Carson, 1854.

The providence of God both as a whole and in all its parts calls for the constant exercise of faith—trusting the Lord that He will order all to His glory and the good of His people—for faith is the eye of the soul by which alone we can discern the spirituality of God's wondrous works. To carnal sense there is much in the history of this world which appears to indicate that no Master-hand is shaping its destiny. How often we hear the wicked exclaim, If there were a God, He surely would not permit this and that. But faith rejects such blasphemies, and while it knows that the ways of the Most High are often "past finding out" to finite intelligence, yet is it fully assured that He holds the helm and is directing the ship of mundane affairs according to His eternal counsels, and therefore will the possessor of a divinely-wrought faith exclaim, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

In like manner, the providence of God requires the exercise of hope, for, "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom 8:25). Hope looks beyond the present to the future, beyond the long dark night to the morning without clouds. Assured that the Lord is working out His eternal purpose, the heart is not only kept in peace, but is filled with joy as it anticipates the glory which is yet to come. The language of hope is, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10), looking beyond the painful fires unto their beneficent efforts. Hope declares, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa 30:5)—through tears the sunrise is envisioned.

It is hardly necessary to add that the providence of God calls for the outflow of love. Faith works by love and hope is kept healthy and vigorous by its exercise. If our heads rest upon the divine bosom, unbelief will be dispelled and our fears quietened. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28), and the more our affections be set upon the divine Worker the calmer our assurance and the clearer our discernment that our Father is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind.



# December

## **THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL**

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). We sincerely trust our readers do not feel that we are running out our meditations on this verse to a wearisome length. Its contents are so full, so marvellous, so blessed, that they might well engage our attention profitably for several more papers thereon. Especially so in view of the fact that there is so very little real doctrinal preaching in this day of superficiality. And even where the people of God have been instructed in the fundamentals of the Gospel, it cannot but refresh and rejoice their hearts to be reminded anew of that which is the wonderment of angels. On this occasion we propose to dwell upon the most important expression in our text.

What is connoted by “the righteousness of God” which we are here said to be made or “become” in Christ? To this a threefold answer may be returned. First, it is a righteousness provided by God, for those who have none of their own. Having lost our original righteousness (when Adam sinned) and thereby fallen under condemnation, God, out of the fullness of His grace, provided a righteousness which met every requirement of His law and secured our salvation, and which upon our believing is placed to our account—in consequence of which we are acquitted from all guilt and given title to the reward of eternal life. This righteousness is one which differs from all other righteousness that ever was or can be performed. It differs entirely from the righteousness of men and angels, for it is the righteousness not of creatures, but of the Creator, “I the LORD have created it” (Isa 45:8). It is therefore a divine and infinitely excellent one.

Second, it is a righteousness effected by God. The Father created it through the Son, in the same way as by the Son He created the universe (Col 1:16), and this because the Son is one with Himself, and therefore do we read of “the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:1). Of old God declared, “I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry” (Isa 46:13). It was during His life on earth that this righteousness was wrought out by the incarnate Son. It consisted of that perfect obedience to the law, both to its precepts and to its penalty, which was yielded to it by our Lord Jesus, who is “The mighty God” (Isa 9:6). This is the “everlasting righteousness” which has been “brought in” (Dan 9:24) by Him. The obedience of Immanuel confers more honour upon the law than the obedience of all intelligent creatures (Isa 42:21). It was a vicarious obedience which the incarnate Son rendered to the law, and therefore is He “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6).

Thus it is the righteousness of God not only because it was planned by Him, but also because it was actually performed by the God-man Mediator. At the very moment when He publicly

dedicated Himself unto that work for which He came here, He declared, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Mat 3:15). Though this flawless conformity to the law was accomplished by the Son of Man, yet He disclaimed all separate praise for the same, “The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (Joh 14:10). That blessed avowal not only expressed the perfections of His human nature as the obedient Glorifier of His Maker and Father, but also intimates that all which He did was the work also of God, for that Man had been taken into personal union with God, and therefore did He affirm, “I and my Father are one” (Joh 10:30).

Third, it is a righteousness accepted by God. God is satisfied with the obedience which Christ performed in the place of His people, and signified His approval thereof by bringing from the dead our Surety and seating Him at His own right hand in the heavens. He has received that righteousness as a perfect ransom for us, for it is the price Christ paid to deliver His people from going down to the pit of everlasting destruction, and by which He obtained for them heavenly and eternal glory. And this perfect obedience of Christ is reckoned to the account of all who are joined to Him by faith. It is legally transferred to them by divine imputation, as it is written, “Even the righteousness of God...upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:22). Faith is no part of that righteousness, but it is through faith it is received and becomes available for salvation. Faith is the belief of the divine testimony concerning that righteousness and trust in Him who is the Author of it. Faith perceives and acknowledges the suitability and excellence of Christ’s righteousness and cordially embraces it.

“That we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). But before we can have a right to anything in Christ, we must be one with Him, we must be joined to Him as our Head, being dead to the law and married to Him. That union is accomplished through faith, and therefore His righteousness, which becomes ours in this way, is called “the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13) and “the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:9). It is called the righteousness of “faith” because faith is the only instrument which God is pleased to make use of in applying His righteousness. These grand truths are presented to faith, for it is the very nature of faith to seek from its glorious Object what it has not in itself. The doctrine of vicarious imputation is something which is entirely foreign to human experience, originating with Him whose thoughts are not as our thoughts and whose ways are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth.

This righteousness is “upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:22). It is not put into them as their sanctification is wrought in the soul by the Spirit, but is placed upon them as a robe, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). It is the spotless garment which is given by the Lord Jesus to those who hear His voice, that they may be clothed and that the shame of their (soul’s) nakedness may not appear (Rev 3:17). It is the “fine linen,” clean and white, with which the Bride, the Lamb’s wife, is arrayed, for the fine linen is “the righteousness of saints” (Rev 19:8). Thus Jesus Christ is of God made unto His people “righteousness” (1Co 1:30)—His righteousness becomes theirs. As our sins were laid upon Him, so His obedience is put upon us. It is not a righteousness wrought by us, but given to and put upon us.

Here, then, is the great glad tidings, the glorious Gospel—that we are made righteousness in Christ. Carnal wisdom cannot apprehend it, but faith closes with and rejoices in it. However contrary it may be to human reason that guilt should be transferred from the unjust to the Just, and that the surety righteousness of Christ should be imputed to worthless sinners, yet faith submissively accepts the truth and thereby do we learn to know the love of Him with whom we have to do. “To the righteousness of Christ is the eye of the believer forever to be directed. On

that righteousness must he rest, on that righteousness must he live, on that righteousness must he die, in that righteousness must he appear before the judgment-seat, in that righteousness must he stand forever in the presence of a righteous God” (Robert Haldane, 1764-1842). Well then may we exclaim with the psalmist, “My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day....I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only” (Psa 71:15-16).

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

### *16. Covetousness Corrected—Matthew 6:19-20*

We are now to enter the fifth division of our Lord’s sermon, and as we do so it is well to remind ourselves afresh of His first and primary design in this important address, namely, to correct and refute the erroneous views of His hearers. The Jews held false beliefs concerning the person of the Messiah, the character of His mission, and the nature of the kingdom He would establish. As unregenerate men, their views were carnal and mundane, self-centered and confined to things temporal. It requires little perspicuity to perceive that all through this sermon the Lord Jesus makes direct reference unto the false notions which were generally entertained by the Jews respecting His kingdom, to which they constantly opposed the holy claims of God, the righteous requirements of His law, and the imperative necessity of the new birth for all who were to be His subjects and disciples.

What has just been pointed out explains why our Lord began His sermon with the beatitudes, in which He described the characters and defined the graces of those who enter His kingdom. The Jews looked for great material enrichment, festivity and feasting, and supposed that those who would occupy the principal positions of honour under the Messiah’s reign would be they who were fierce and successful warriors, and who though ceremonially holy would avenge on the Gentiles all the wrongs they had inflicted on Israel, and that henceforth they would be free from all opposition and oppression. But Christ declared blessed are those who were poor in spirit, who mourned, who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, who were merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and who were persecuted for righteousness’ sake. A greater contrast could not be imagined.

So in His second division, Christ announced that the officers of His kingdom would not be the destroyers of men’s bodies but the preservers of their souls—the “salt of the earth” (Mat 5:13)—not the suppressers of the Gentiles, but “the light of the world” (Mat 5:14) In like manner, in His third division, Christ declared that so far from it being His mission to overthrow the ancient order and introduce radical changes, He came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Thus, too, with what is now to be before us, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Mat 6:19-20). The Jews expected in their Messiah a temporal prince, and the happiness they anticipated under His sceptre was merely a high degree of worldly prosperity, to enjoy an abundance of riches, honours, and pleasures. But our Lord here exposes their error, and declares that the happiness He imparts is not carnal but spiritual, and that it will be found in its perfection not on earth (Palestine) but in heaven.

Now it should be pointed out that the false notions generally entertained by the Jews respecting the Messiah’s kingdom originated in principles which are common to unregenerate

human nature, though taking a peculiar form and colour from their special circumstances. Hence it is that the teachings of Christ in this sermon are pertinent to all men in every age. Human nature is the same everywhere. The citizens of this world have ever devoted the greater part of their time and energy in procuring and accumulating something which they may call their own, and in setting their hearts steadfastly upon the same rather than upon God. So general is this practice that, providing they are not unduly unscrupulous and do not injure their fellows in their greedy quest, such a policy evokes approval rather than reproach, “Men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself” (Psa 49:18). Those who succeed in business are called shrewd and efficient, and those who amass great wealth, “the captains of industry,” “financial wizards,” etc.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Mat 6:19). The order of truth followed by Christ in Matthew 6 is very striking and blessed, and needs to be carefully heeded by us. In the first 18 verses, we are conducted into the Sanctuary, instructed to have our hearts occupied with Him who sees in secret. In verse 19 and onwards, we come out to face the temptations and trials of the world. It is parallel with what we find in Leviticus and Numbers—in the former, Israel is engaged almost entirely with the services and privileges of the tabernacle—in the latter, we have a description of their walk and warfare in the wilderness. It is of vital importance we attend to this order, for it is only as we duly maintain communion with God in the secret place that we are equipped and enabled for the trials of the way as we journey toward the heavenly Canaan. Unless our hearts be firmly set upon the Promised Land, they will turn back to Egypt and lust after its flesh-pots.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Mat 6:19). From here to the end of the chapter, Christ’s design is to divert the hearts of His hearers from a spirit of covetousness, first delivering the prohibition and then amplifying and enforcing the same by a variety of cogent reasons. The word for “lay up” is more expressive and emphatic in the original than is expressed here in the English—signifying first to gather together, and second, to hoard or heap up against the future—as in Romans 2:5, “heapeth up” or “treasurest up unto thyself.” “Treasure” means wealth in abundance, costly things such as property, lands, gold and precious stones. The words “upon earth” here refer not so much to place as to the kind of treasures, for heavenly treasure may be laid up while we are here on earth, and therefore it is the hoarding of earthly and material treasures which is in view.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Mat 6:19). There have been some fanatics who interpreted this command literally, insisting that it is to be taken without limitation, as a prohibition against accumulating money or adding to our earthly possessions. To be consistent they should not stop there but go on to “sell that thou hast, and give to the poor” (Mat 19:21), for this is no less expressly required than the former. But such a course would mean the overturning of all distinctions between rich and poor, any possession of property, which is clearly contrary to the whole trend of Scripture. Let us, then, briefly point out what Christ did not here forbid. First, diligent labour in a man’s vocation, whereby he provides things needful for himself and those dependent upon him—“not slothful in business” (Rom 12:11) is one of the precepts of the Gospel.

Nor does Christ here forbid the fruit of our labours in the possession of goods and riches, provided they be acquired honestly and used aright. Let us not forget that Scripture, “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deu 8:18). The Lord graciously prospered Abraham, Job, and David, and so far from their possession of wealth being a mark of His disfavour, it was the very opposite. Third, nor does Christ here forbid the laying up in store for our own future use or for our family. Is not the sluggard admonished to

take a leaf out of the book of the ants, who gather together their winter's food in the summertime (Pro 6:6-8)? And has not the apostle declared that, "The children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children" (2Co 12:14). And again—"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1Ti 5:8).

What, then, is it which Christ here forbids? We answer, various forms of covetousness. First, the excessive seeking after worldly wealth, wherein men keep neither moderation nor measure. Although God gives them more than needed to supply their needs, yet they are not content, their desire being insatiable. That it is not sinful for a man to seek after the necessities of life—either for his present or future use—we have shown above. As to what constitutes necessity varies considerably in different cases, according to the station which providence has allotted in this world—a workman requires tools, a business man must have capital, the master of a large estate needs sufficient revenues to pay his servants. No precise rule can be laid down, but the judgment and example of the godly who use the creature aright, and not the practice of the covetous, must guide us.

Second, Christ here condemns those who seek principally after worldly goods and disparage and disregard the true riches. This is clear from the opposition made in the next verse, where, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," is placed over against, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth" (Mat 6:19). Thus it was in the case of Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage (see Heb 12:16). Thus it was with the Gadarenes, who upon the loss of their herds of swine, besought Christ that He would depart out of their coasts (Luk 8:37). Thus it has been throughout the ages, and so it still is, that the great majority of men spend their strength in labouring after that which "satisfieth not" (Isa 55:2), seeking after almost anything or everything rather than after that which does not perish. That is why there is so much preaching and so little profiting—the hearers' thoughts and desires are taken up with other things.

Third, Christ here condemns those who put their trust and confidence in worldly things that they have treasured up, which is idolatry of the heart. Whatever a man sets his heart upon and looks to for support, it is his god, and therefore his covetousness is called "idolatry" (Col 3:5). If we have stored up a supply against future need, and this takes us from dependence upon God for our daily sustenance, then we are guilty of this sin. It is for this reason that Christ makes it so hard for a rich man to enter heaven (Mat 19:23-24), because he trusts in his riches, and if we are close observers we shall usually find that rich men are proud-hearted and secure, neither heeding God's judgments nor attending to the means of salvation. David's counsel must therefore be followed, "If riches increase [not give them away, but], set not your heart upon them" (Psa 62:10).

The fourth practice here forbidden is the selfish laying up of treasures, for ourselves only, without regard to using the same for the good of our generation, the support of the Gospel, or the praise of God. This is indeed a devilish practice, for everyone of us is but a steward, to dispense our portion to the glory of God and the good of his fellows. The poor are God's poor, the creatures of His hands, and therefore He requires that each steward should be found faithful in seeing to it that each of them has his portion. God will yet call the rich to an accounting, therefore let each of us live in the light of that day of reckoning. Let us seek grace to be preserved from hoarding up riches for our own selfish use, from putting our trust in them, and from making them our chief delight.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Mat 6:19). Here our Lord gives a threefold reason for the enforcing of His precept, or illustrates the corruption and uncertainty of worldly possessions by

three examples—showing they are liable to destruction by such creatures as moths, by the inherent decay which pertains to all earthly things, and from the fact they may be taken from us by fraud or violence. Have we procured an elaborate wardrobe? in secret and silence the moth may be eating it up. Have we invested in property? the ravages of time will soon wear it away. Is it gold and platinum, diamonds and pearls we have hoarded up? The hand of the marauder may soon seize them. Heaven is the only safe place in which to deposit our riches.

As we have pointed out in an earlier paragraph, the vast majority of our fellows make it their supreme aim in life to acquire as much as possible of worldly wealth. With such an example on every side, and the trend of their own hearts in the same direction, the disciples of Christ are in greater danger from this sin than from most others. To nullify this evil tendency, Christ here emphasizes the relative valuelessness of mundane things. “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle” (Pro 23:5). What true satisfaction can there be in the possession of things which are subject to decay and loss by violence? One of the strongest proofs of human depravity and of the diseased state of our minds is the extreme difficulty which most of us experience in the realizing of this fact in such a way that it really influences our actions.

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mat 6:20). Having shown what we must not do in respect of treasures here on earth, and knowing his inclination to be such that man will needs have something for his treasure, Christ here makes known what treasure we may lay up for ourselves. But how shall we lay up treasure in heaven? for we cannot of ourselves go there. No man can save himself—the beginning, progress, and end of our salvation is wholly of God. Answer—as often in Scripture, the work of the efficient cause is here ascribed to the instrument (cf. 1Co 4:15; 1Ti 4:16). To make us rich with heavenly treasure is the work of God alone, yet because we are instrumental by His grace in the use of means to get this treasure, this command is given to us as though the work is solely ours, though God be alone the Author of it.

It is of most importance that we form a true estimate of what is necessary for true happiness—where it is to be found and how it is to be obtained—for the tenor of our thoughts, the direction of our affections, and the pursuit of our energies will largely be regulated thereby. Therefore does Christ here bid us, “Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Mat 6:20). That we may better understand and practice this command, two points are to be carefully and reverently considered—what this treasure is and how a man may lay it up for himself—matters of the greatest weight, for in the practice thereof lies our salvation. As to the real treasure, which neither time nor the creature can mar, it is the true and living God, the triune JEHOVAH who made and governs all things. In Him alone is all genuine good and happiness to be found.

This is clear from such Scriptures as the Lord’s statement to Abraham, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen 15:1); the words of Eliphaz to Job, “The Almighty shall be thy gold” (Job 22:25, margin); and the declaration of David, “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance....I have a goodly heritage”—i.e., He is my treasure (Psa 16:5-6). Yet let it be said emphatically that it is God as He is revealed in Christ who is our Treasure, for out of Christ He is “a consuming fire” (Deu 4:24). God incarnate is our true treasure, for in Him are hid “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Our very life is “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1Co 2:9). To what is the apostle there referring? Why, as the previous verse shows, to that which God has treasured up for His people in a

crucified Christ. The Lord Jesus is the great fountain and storehouse of all true blessings communicated from God to the saints, and therefore do they exclaim, “Of his fulness [as out of a rich treasury] have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16). Would you have remission of sins and righteousness with God? Then Christ was “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). Would you have everlasting well-being? Then Christ Himself is “The true God, and eternal life” (1Jo 5:20). Whatever you need—wisdom to direct, strength to energize, comfort to assuage grief, cleansing for defilement—all is to be found in the Saviour.

How may we lay up for ourselves in heaven the divine and durable riches which are to be found in Christ? First, by faith’s appropriation, “As many as received him” (Joh 1:12)—so that I can say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song 2:16). God in Christ becomes our everlasting portion when we surrender to and accept Him as He is offered to us in the Gospel. Second, by daily communion with Christ, drawing from His “unsearchable riches” (Eph 3:8). “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luk 10:42). And what was that “good part”? why, to sit at His feet and drink in His word (Luk 10:39). Third, by emulating the example which Christ has left us. And what did that example consist of? why, complete self abnegation, living wholly in subjection to God—for which He was richly rewarded (see Phi 2:5-11). Fourth, by acting as His stewards and using the goods He has entrusted to us by laying them out to His glory (see Luk 12:33; Heb 6:10, etc.).

Most all will say they hope for happiness from God in the next world, but what do they now make their chief good? What are they most taken up with, both in the pursuit and the enjoyment? It is at this point each of us must examine and test himself. What things do my soul most favour and relish? The things of the world or of God (see Rom 8:5)? Which seasons of time do I regard as lost or as most gainful? Which are my days of richest income? Of the Sabbath the wicked ask, “When will it be gone?” But the healthy saint declares, “A day in thy courts is better than a thousand” (Psa 84:10)—because of the spiritual gains it brings in. What is dearest to my heart? What engages my most serious thoughts? This determines which I prize the more highly—earthly or heavenly treasures.

## **THE LIFE OF ELIJAH**

### *12. Facing Danger*

Unto one filled with such zeal for the Lord and love for His people, the prolonged inactivity to which he was forced to submit must have proved severe trial unto Elijah. So energetic and courageous a prophet would naturally be anxious to take advantage of the present distress of his countrymen. He would desire to awaken them to a sense of their grievous sins and urge them to return unto the Lord. Instead—so different are God’s ways from ours—he was required to remain in complete seclusion month after month and year after year. Nevertheless, his Master had a wise and gracious design in this trying discipline of His servant. Throughout his long stay by the brook Cherith, Elijah proved the faithfulness and sufficiency of the Lord, and he gained not a little from his protracted sojourn at Zarephath. As the apostle reveals both in 2 Corinthians 6:4 and 12:12, the first mark of an approved servant of Christ is the grace of spiritual “patience,” and this is developed by the trials of faith (Jam 1:3).

The years spent by Elijah at Zarephath were far from being wasted, for during his stay in the widow's home he obtained confirmation of his divine call, by the remarkable seal which was there given to his ministry. Thereby he approved himself to the conscience of his hostess, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth" (1Ki 17:24). It was highly important that the prophet should have such a testimony to the divine source of his mission before entering upon the more difficult and dangerous part of it which yet lay before him. His own heart was blessedly confirmed, and he was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the assurance that he was a servant of JEHOVAH and that the Word of the Lord was indeed in his mouth. Such a seal to his ministry (the quickening of the dead child) and the approving of himself in the conscience of the mother was a grand encouragement for him as he set out to face the great crisis and conflict at Carmel.

What a message is there here for any ardent ministers of Christ whom providence may for a season have laid by from public service. They are so desirous of doing good and promoting the glory of their Master in the salvation of sinners and the building up of His saints, that they feel their enforced inactivity to be a severe trial. But let them rest assured that the Lord has some good reason for laying this restraint upon them, and therefore they should earnestly seek grace that they may not be fretful under it, nor take matters into their own hands in seeking to force a way out of it. Ponder the case of Elijah! He uttered no complaints nor did he venture out of the retirement into which God had sent him. He waited patiently for the Lord to direct him, to set him at liberty, and to enlarge his sphere of usefulness. Meanwhile, by fervent intercession, he was made a great blessing unto those in the home.

"And it came to pass after many days" (1Ki 18:1). Let us attend to this expression of the blessed Spirit. It is not "after three years" (as was indeed the case), but "after many days." There is here an important lesson for our hearts if we will heed it. We should live a day at a time, and count our lives by days. "Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down" (Job 14:1-2). Such was the view of life taken by the aged Jacob. For when Pharaoh asked the patriarch, "How old art thou?" he answered, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years" (Gen 47:9). Happy are they whose constant prayer is, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psa 90:12). Yet how prone we are to count by years. Let us endeavour to live each day as though we knew it were our last.

"And it came to pass" (1Ki 18:1)—that is, the predetermined counsel of JEHOVAH was now actualized. The fulfillment of the divine purpose can neither be retarded nor forced by us. God will not be hurried either by our petulance or our prayers. We have to wait His appointed hour, and when it strikes, He acts—it "comes to pass" just as He had foreordained. The precise length of time His servant is to remain in a certain place was predestined by Him from all eternity. "It came to pass after many days" (1Ki 18:1)—that is, over a thousand since the drought had commenced, "that the word of the LORD came to Elijah" (1Ki 18:1). God had not forgotten His servant. The Lord never forgets any of His people, for has He not said, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands: thy walls are continually before me" (Isa 49:16)? O that we might never forget Him, but "set the LORD always before us" (see Psa 16:8). "In the third year" (1Ki 18:1)—that is, of his stay at Zarephath.

"The word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth" (1Ki 18:1). So that we may better understand the tremendous test of the prophet's courage which this command involved, let us seek to obtain some idea of what must now have been the state of that wicked king's mind. We began this book by pondering

the words, “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1Ki 17:1). Now we are to consider the sequel to this. We have seen how it fared with Elijah during the lengthy interval, we must now ascertain how things were going with Ahab, his court, and his subjects. Dreadful indeed must be the state of things on earth when the heavens are shut up and no moisture is given for three years. “There was a sore famine in Samaria” (1Ki 18:2).

“And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts” (1Ki 18:5). The barest possible outline is here presented, but it is not difficult to fill in the details. Israel had sinned grievously against the Lord, and so they were made to feel the weight of the rod of His righteous anger. What an humbling picture of God’s favoured people, to behold their king going forth to seek grass, if perchance he could find a little somewhere so that the lives of those beasts which remained might be saved. What a contrast from the abundance and glory of Solomon’s days! But JEHOVAH had been grossly dishonoured, His truth had been rejected. The vile Jezebel had defiled the land by the pestilential influence of her false prophets and priests. The altars of Baal had supplanted that of the Lord, and therefore as Israel had sown the wind they must now be made to reap the whirlwind.

And what effect had the severe judgment of heaven produced upon Ahab and his subjects? “And Ahab said unto Obadiah, go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts” (1Ki 18:5). There is not a single syllable here about God! not a word about the awful sins which had called down His displeasure upon the land! Fountains, brooks, and grass were all that occupied Ahab’s thoughts—relief from the divine affliction was all he cared about. It is ever thus with the reprobate. It was so with Pharaoh—as each fresh plague descended upon Egypt, he sent for Moses and begged him to pray for its removal, and as soon as it was removed he hardened his heart and continued to defy the Most High. Unless God is pleased to directly sanctify to our souls His chastisements, they profit us not. No matter how severe His judgments or how long they be protracted, man is never softened thereby unless God performs a work of grace within him. “And they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev 16:10-11).

Nowhere is the awful depravity of human nature more grievously displayed than at this very point. First, men look upon a prolonged dry season as a freak of nature which must be endured, refusing to see the hand of God in it. Later, if it be borne in upon them that they are under a divine judgment, they assume a spirit of defiance. A later prophet in Israel complained of the people in his day for manifesting this vile temper, “O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock” (Jer 5:3). From this we may see how utterly absurd and erroneous are the teachings of Romanists on purgatory and of Universalists on hell. “The imagined fire of purgatory or the real torments of hell possess no purifying effect, and the sinner under the anguish of his sufferings will continually increase in wickedness and accumulate wrath to all eternity” (Thomas Scott, 1747-1821).

“And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself” (1Ki 18:5-6). What a picture do these words

present! Not only had the Lord no place in his thoughts, but Ahab says nothing about his people, who next to God should have been his chief concern. His evil heart seemed incapable of rising higher than horses and mules—such was what concerned him in the day of Israel’s dire calamity. What a contrast between the low and groveling selfishness of this wretch and the noble spirit of the man after God’s own heart. “And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house” (2Sa 24:17). That was the language of a regenerate king when his land was trembling beneath God’s chastening rod because of his sin .

As the drought continued and the distressing effects thereof became more and more acute, we can well imagine the bitter resentment and hot indignation borne by Ahab and his vile consort against the one who had pronounced the terrible interdict of no dew nor rain. So incensed was Jezebel that she had “cut off [slain] the prophets of the LORD” (1Ki 18:4), and so infuriated was the king that he had sought diligently for Elijah in all the surrounding nations, requiring an oath from their rulers that they were not providing asylum for the man whom he regarded as his worst enemy and cause of all his trouble. And now the Word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, “Go, show thyself unto Ahab” (1Ki 18:1)! If much boldness had been required when he was called upon to announce the awful drought, what courage was needed for him to now face the one who sought him with merciless rage.

“It came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself to Ahab” (1Ki 18:1). The movements of Elijah were all ordered of God—he was “not his own” but the servant of Another. When the Lord bade him, “hide thyself” (1Ki 17:3), he must retire at His orders, and when He says, “Go shew thyself” (1Ki 18:1), Elijah must comply with the divine will. Elijah’s courage did not fail him, for “the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro 28:1). He declined not the present commission but went forth without murmur or delay. Humanly speaking it was highly dangerous for the prophet to return unto Samaria, for he could not expect any welcome from the people who were in such sore straits nor any mercy from the king. But with the same unhesitating obedience as had previously characterized him, so now he complied with his Master’s orders. Like the apostle Paul he counted not his life dear unto himself, but was ready to be tortured and slain if that was the Lord’s will for him.

“And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him” (1Ki 18:7). A few extremists (“Separatists”) have grossly traduced the character of Obadiah, denouncing him as an unfaithful compromiser, as one who sought to serve two masters. But the Holy Spirit has not stated he did wrong in remaining in Ahab’s employ, nor intimated that his spiritual life suffered in consequence. Instead, He has expressly told us that “Obadiah feared the LORD greatly” (1Ki 18:3), which is one of the highest tributes which could be paid him. God has often given His people favour in the sight of heathen masters (as Joseph and Daniel), and has magnified the sufficiency of His grace by preserving their souls in the midst of the most unpromising environments. His saints are found in very unlikely places—as in “Caesar’s household” (Phi 4:22).

There is nothing wrong in a child of God holding a position of influence if he can do so without the sacrifice of principle. On the contrary, it may enable him to render valuable service to the cause of God. Where would Luther and the Reformation have been, humanly speaking, had it not been for the Elector of Saxony? And what would have been the fate of our own Wycliffe, if John O’Gaunt had not constituted him his ward? As the governor of Ahab’s household, Obadiah was undoubtedly in a most difficult and dangerous position, yet so far from bowing his knee to

Baal, he was instrumental in saving the lives of many of God's servants. Though surrounded by so many temptations, he preserved his integrity. It is also to be carefully noted that when Elijah met him, he uttered no word of reproach unto Obadiah. Let us not be too hasty in changing our situation, for the devil can assail us in one place just as easily as in another .

As Elijah was on his way to confront Ahab, he met the pious governor of the king's household, "And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou my lord Elijah?" (1Ki 18:7). Obadiah recognized Elijah, yet he could scarcely believe his eyes. It was remarkable that the prophet had survived the merciless onslaught of Jezebel on the servants of JEHOVAH. It was still more incredible to see him here, alone, journeying into Samaria. Most diligent search had long been made for him, but in vain, and now he comes unexpectedly upon him. Who can conceive the mixed feelings of awe and delight as Obadiah gazed upon the man of God, by whose word the awful drought and sore famine had almost completely desolated the land? Obadiah at once showed the greatest respect for him and did obeisance to him. "As he had shown the tenderness of a father to the sons of the prophets, so he showed the reverence of a son to the father of the prophets, and by this made it appear he did indeed fear the Lord greatly" (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

"And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here" (1Ki 18:8). The prophet's courage did not fail him. He had received orders from God to "show himself unto Ahab," and therefore he made no attempt to conceal his identity when interrogated by the governor. Let us shrink not to boldly declare our Christian discipleship when challenged by those who meet us. It is also to be duly noted that Elijah honoured Ahab, wicked though he was, by speaking of him to Obadiah as "thy lord." It is the duty of inferiors to show respect to their superiors—of subjects concerning their sovereign, of servants concerning their master. We must render to all that to which their office or station entitles them. It is no mark of spirituality to be vulgar in our conduct or brusque in our speech. God commands us to "Honour the king" (1Pe 2:17)—because of his office—whether he be an Ahab or a Nero.

"And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?" (1Ki 18:8-9). It was only natural that Obadiah should wish to be excused from so perilous an errand. First, he asks wherein he had offended either the Lord or His prophet that he should be asked to be the messenger of such distasteful tidings to the king—sure proof that his own conscience was clear! Second, he lets Elijah know of the great pains which his royal master had taken in endeavouring to track down the prophet and discover his hiding place, "As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom wither my lord hath not sent to seek thee" (1Ki 18:10). Yet in spite of all their diligence they were not able to discover him—so effectually did God secure him from their malice. Utterly futile is it for man to attempt to hide when the Lord seeks him out—equally useless is it for him to seek when God hides anything from him.

"And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here" (1Ki 18:11). Surely you are not serious in making such a request. Do you not know the consequence will be fatal to me if I am unable to make good such a declaration? "And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth" (1Ki 18:12). He was afraid that Elijah would again mysteriously disappear, and then his master would likely be enraged because he had not arrested the prophet, and certainly he would be furious if he found himself imposed upon by discovering no trace of him when he duly arrived at this spot. Finally, he asks, "Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of

the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?" (1Ki 18:13). Obadiah made reference to these noble and daring deeds of his not in any boastful spirit, but for the purpose of attesting his sincerity. Elijah reassured him with an oath, and Obadiah obediently complied with his request, "And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him today. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah" (1Ki 18:15-16).

## **THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY**

### *6. Its Problem*

We have now arrived at the most difficult part of our subject, and much wisdom from above is needed if we are to be preserved from error on the right hand or the left. It has been well-said that truth is like a narrow path running between two precipices. The figure is an apt one, for fatal consequences attend those which depart from the teaching of God's Word, no matter which direction that departure may take. It is so here with the doctrine we are now treating of. It matters little whether the total bondage of the fallen creature under evil and his utter inability to perform that which is good in the sight of God be repudiated and the freedom of the natural man be insisted upon, or whether his complete spiritual impotency be affirmed and at the same time his responsibility to perform that which is pleasing unto God be denied. In either case the effect is equally disastrous. In the former, the sinner is given a false confidence; in the latter, he is reduced to fatalistic inertia. In either case the real state of man is grossly misrepresented.

Those who have sought to follow us carefully through the present series must have felt the force of the difficulties which we now desire to face—and if the Spirit is pleased to enable, throw some light thereon toward their solution. Such questions as these must have occurred to thoughtful people. If the carnal mind be such fearful enmity against God that it is not subject unto His law "neither indeed can be," then why does He continue to press its demands upon us and insist that we meet its requirements under pain of eternal death? If the Fall has rendered man morally helpless and reduced him to the point where he is "without strength," then with what propriety can he be called upon to render obedience unto the divine precepts? If man be so thoroughly depraved that he is the slave of sin, wherein lies his accountability to live unto the glory of God? If man is born under "the bondage of corruption," how can he possibly be "without excuse" in connection with the sins which he commits?

In seeking answers to these and similar questions, we must of necessity confine ourselves to what is clearly revealed thereon in Holy Writ. We say "of necessity," for unless we forsake our own thoughts (Isa 55:7) and completely submit our minds unto God's, we are certain to err. In theory this is granted, by most professing Christians, yet in practice it is only too often set aside—in the general it is conceded, but in particular it is ignored. A highly trained intellect may draw what appears to be incontestable conclusions from a Scriptural premise, yet though logic cannot refute them, nevertheless the practice of Christ and His apostles manifest them to be false. On the one hand, we may take the fact that the Lord has given orders for His Gospel to be preached unto every creature—then must we not infer that the sinner has it in his own power to either accept or reject the same? Such an inference certainly appears reasonable, yet it is erroneous. On the other

hand, take the fact that the sinner is spiritually impotent—then is it not a mockery to bid him come unto Christ? Such an inference certainly appears reasonable, yet it is false.

It is at this very point that most of Christendom has been deluged with such a flood of errors. Most of the leading denominations began by taking the Word of God as the foundation and substance of their creed. But alas, almost at once that foundation was turned into a platform upon which the proud intellect of men was exercised and in a very short time human reason—logical and plausible—supplanted divine revelation. Men sought to work out theological systems and articles of faith that were thoroughly “consistent,” which—unlike the workings of both nature and providence—contained in them no seeming “contradictions” or “absurdities,” but which commended themselves unto their fellows. But this was nothing less than a presumptuous attempt to compress the truth of God into man-made molds, to reduce that which issued from the Infinite into terms comprehensible to finite minds. It is only another sad example of that egotism which refuses to receive what it cannot understand.

It is true, blessedly true, that there is perfect harmony in all parts of divine truth. How can it be otherwise, since God is the Author thereof? Yet so blind are men that they cannot perceive this perfect harmony. Some cannot discern the consistency between the infinite love and grace of God, and His requiring His own Son to pay such a costly satisfaction to His broken law. Some cannot see the consistency between the everlasting mercy of God and the eternal punishment of the wicked, insisting that if the former be true the latter is impossible. Some cannot see the congruity of Christ satisfying every requirement of God on behalf of His people, and the imperative necessity of holiness and obedience in them if they are to benefit thereby. Or between their divine preservation and the certainty of destruction were they to finally apostatize. Some cannot see the accordance between the divine foreordination of our actions and of our freedom therein. Some cannot see the agreement between efficacious grace in the conversion of sinners and the needs-be for the exercise of their faculties in a way of duty. Some cannot see the concurrence of the total depravity or spiritual impotency of man and his responsibility to be completely subject unto God’s will.

As a sample of what we have referred to in the last two paragraphs, take the following quotation. “We deny duty-faith and duty-repentance—these terms signifying that it is every man’s duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe (Gen 6:5, 8:21; Mat 15:19; Jer 17:9; Joh 6:44, 65). We deny, also, that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God (Joh 12:39-40; Eph 2:8; Rom 8:7-8; 1Co 4:7). We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely different circumstances. And we further believe that an assumption that others have been inspired as the apostles were has led to the grossest errors amongst both Romanists and professed Protestants. Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption.”

It may come as a surprise unto many of our readers to learn that the above are a (verbatim and full) quotation from the “Articles of Faith” of a Baptist denomination (or “society”) in England with a considerable membership, and which will permit no man to enter their pulpits who does

not solemnly subscribe to and sign his name to the same. Yet such is the case, and we may add that these Articles of Faith accurately express the belief of the “Primitive Baptists” in the U.S.A. In consequence, the Gospel of Christ is deliberately withheld from the unsaved and no appeals are addressed unto them to close with the Gospel offer and receive Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. Need we wonder that fewer and fewer are coming forth in their midst to testify of a divine work of grace wrought in their hearts, and that many of their churches have already ceased to be?

It is a good thing that many of the Lord’s people are sounder of heart than the creeds held in their heads, yet that does not excuse them for subscribing to what is flagrantly unscriptural. It is far from being a pleasant task to expose the fallacy of these Articles of Faith, for we have some very dear friends committed to the same, yet we feel we should be failing in our duty unto them if we made no effort to convince them of their errors. Let us then examine, briefly, these Articles. First, they deny that it is the duty of every man who hears the Gospel to spiritually and savingly repent and believe, and this notwithstanding the fact that it has been the uniform practice of well nigh all the true servants of Christ in every generation (including the Reformers and nine-tenths of the godly Puritans), but also in the very face of plain teaching of Holy Writ to the contrary. We will not supply quotations from the writings of those most used of the Spirit in the past, but confine ourselves unto God’s Word.

God Himself “now commandeth all man every where to repent” (Act 17:30). What could possibly be plainer than that? There is no room for any quibbling, misunderstanding, or evasion. It means just what it says, and says just what it means. The framers of those Articles, then, are taking direct issue with the Most High. It is because of his “hardness and impenitent heart” that the sinner treasures up unto himself “wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5). “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:18-19). Here, too, it is impossible to fairly evade the force of our Lord’s language. He holds it to be the duty of all who hear the Gospel to savingly believe on Himself, and declares that rejecters are condemned because they do not believe, and therefore it is that when He returns it will be “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel” (2Th 1:8).

Next we may note that the framers of these Articles follow their denial by referring to six verses of Scripture, the first four of which treat of the desperate wickedness of the natural man’s heart and the last two with his complete inability to turn unto Christ until divinely enabled. These passages are manifestly alluded to in support of the contention made—the real pertinency of them to the point under discussion each reader must decide for himself. The only relevancy they can possess is on the supposition that they establish a premise which requires us to draw the conclusion so dogmatically expressed. In other words, we are asked to believe that since fallen man is totally depraved we must necessarily infer that he is not a fit subject to be exhorted to perform spiritual acts. Thus, when analyzed, this Article is seen to consist of nothing more than a piece of human reasoning.

Not only does the substance of this Article of Faith consist of nothing more substantial and reliable than a mental inference, but when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary it is found to clash with other Scriptures, that is, with the practice of God’s own servants recorded therein. For example, we do not find the sweet psalmist of Israel accommodating his exhortations to the sinful inability of the natural man. Far from it. David called upon the ungodly to, “Be wise now

therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psa 2:10-12). David did not withhold these counsels because they were such rebels that they would not and could not render their heart’s allegiance to the King of kings, but uncompromisingly and bluntly bade them do so, whether they could or not.

It was the same with the prophets. If ever a man addressed an unregenerate congregation it was when the Tishbite spake to the idolatrous Israelites, “Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1Ki 18:21). That exhortation was not restricted to the remnant of renewed souls, but was addressed to that nation indiscriminately. It was a plain call for them to perform a spiritual duty, for them to exercise their will and choose between God and the devil. In like manner we find Isaiah called upon the degenerate generation of his day, “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well” (Isa 1:16-17). One of them went so far as to say to his hearers, “Make you a new heart and a new spirit” (Eze 18:31), yet he was in perfect accord with his fellow prophet who taught the helplessness of man in those memorable questions, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jer 13:23). These men, then, did not decide they must preach only that which lay in the power of their hearers to comply with.

The words, “We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever,” will strike the vast majority of God’s people as far too sweeping. They will readily allow that fallen man possesses no power at all to perform any spiritual acts, yet they will also insist that nothing prevents the spiritual obedience of any sinner except his own unwillingness. Man by nature, that is, as he originally left the hands of his Creator, was endowed with full capability to meet his Maker’s requirements; nor has the Fall robbed him of a single faculty, and it is his retention of all his faculties which constitutes him still a responsible creature. Of the last four passages referred to (Joh 12:39, etc.), two of them related to the spiritual impotency of fallen man and the other two unto divine enablement imparted to those who are saved.

With regard to the other Articles affirming the belief that it “would be unsafe” for us now to derive rules for ministerial address from the way in which the apostles spoke to their hearers. This is their summary method of disposing of all those passages of Scripture in Old and New Testaments alike which are directly opposed to their theory. Since the Lord Jesus Himself hesitated not to say unto the people, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mar 1:15), surely His servants today need not have the slightest hesitation in following His example. If ministers of the Word are not now to find their guidance and rules from the practice of their Master and His apostles, then where shall they look for them? Must each one be a rule unto himself? or must they perforce place themselves under the domination of self-made popes? These very men who are such sticklers for “consistency” are not consistent with themselves, for when it comes to matters of church polity they take the practice of the apostles for their guidance! Lack of space prevents further comments on this occasion.

## THE JUSTICE OF GOD

We have seen that the justice of God in His government of this world is manifested in the consciences of men and in the dispensations of providence. Let us now behold how it is evidenced in the work of redemption. Here it has pleased the Most High to give a signal demonstration of His righteousness according to the requirements of that law which He has framed. Nowhere are the principles of the divine administration exhibited so plainly as here, yet nowhere, we may add, is it so imperative for us to be completely subject to the Scriptures if our thoughts thereon are to honour the Lord God. If the works of creation contain mysteries which are beyond our powers to solve, and if the dispensations of providence are often sorely perplexing, the yet grander work of redemption—God’s masterpiece—must fill with reverent awe those who endeavour to contemplate its method and meaning. Only as we interpret by the light of Holy Writ the amazing anomaly of the Just suffering for the unjust shall we be preserved from the most horrible errors.

In connection with the work of redemption, we are confronted with the astonishing spectacle of a Person, whom even His worst enemies acknowledged to be free from the slightest stain of impurity and of whose moral conduct heaven itself testified an unqualified approbation, spending His days in such affliction, and ending His career in such anguish, that He was denominated “the man of sorrows.” If guilt precedes affliction and is the cause of it, then to behold the Holy One enduring the unabated curse of the law presents a problem which human wisdom is utterly incapable of solving. Yea, it is at this very point that the blasphemies of infidels have raved the loudest. But this is exactly what Scripture leads us to expect, for it plainly tells us that the preaching of Christ crucified is “unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness.” Yet this same passage at once adds, “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1Co 1:24).

The light of divine revelation removes what is a stumblingblock to those who walk in darkness. So far from the Scriptures uttering the least apology for God in His appointment of Christ unto death, they declare, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:21-25). So far from the death of Christ casting the slightest reflection upon God’s justice, this very passage repeats, “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). The Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for sin has been exhibited for this very end, to demonstrate the righteousness of God in this greatest transaction of all time, so that He now acquits the guiltiest transgressor who trusts in the Saviour without infringing the rights of His government—yea, manifesting and magnifying His very justice in so doing.

Though personally innocent of the slightest infraction of God’s law, yea, though rendering to it a perfect and perpetual obedience, yet the Lord Jesus Christ suffered vicariously as the Substitute of His people. Nor was this fearful sacrifice forced upon Him against His own will—rather did He freely assume the office of Surety and voluntarily discharge its duties. It must ever be borne in mind that He who presented Himself as the Sponsor of God’s elect possessed rights and prerogatives which belong to no mere creature. He was complete master of His own life. He voluntarily assumed our nature and held His life for the purpose of surrendering it as a ransom for us. He Himself made this unmistakably plain when He declared, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Joh 10:17-18). If

one who was innocent voluntarily received the wages of sin, then God's hatred of sin was unmistakably manifested, the authority of His government maintained, and the requirements of His justice fully satisfied.

From earliest times this apparent travesty of justice—an innocent victim being slaughtered in the place of the guilty—held a prominent place in the divine appointments for His people. The divine institution of propitiatory sacrifices and their abundant use under the economy God framed, was solemnly enforced by that penal statute, “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:10-11). Of such frequent application, of such varied utility, and of such high importance was the expiatory blood of sacrifices that the Holy Spirit moved an apostle to say, “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22).

What striking and emphatic declarations are those—the blood makes an atonement for the soul—almost all things were purged by blood—no remission without the shedding of blood. As no blood was expiatory except that which was poured out in sacrifice to God, that which brought death on the victim, and that in which the death of a victim was vicarious—God kept constantly before His people under the typical system of worship the fact that pardon would not be dispensed to transgressors nor communion with Himself enjoyed except in strict connection with a display of punitive justice. But though the propitiatory sacrifices were so many testimonies to JEHOVAH's purity, so many evidences of His righteousness, yet in their nature, application, and efficacy they did not extend to the burdened conscience but were limited to the removal of ceremonial defilement and to a typical prefiguration of the Messiah's priestly work. They were so far from fully exhibiting the governmental perfections of God that they were merely shadows and pre-intimations of that which was to be manifested when “the fullness of time should come.”

“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God...by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:4-10). Here is the grand transition from the shadows to the substance. The typical sacrifices were inadequate for displaying the righteousness of God, and therefore were they superceded by the all-sufficient sacrifice. None other than the Son of God Himself took upon Him our humanity (immaculately conceived) and came into this world to do in reality what had been previously prefigured of Him.

In the above passage, our blessed Redeemer stands forth as a voluntary victim, completely qualified to make full expiation of sin. Confident of His own perfect qualifications to perform the arduous work, absolutely willing to undergo all the bitterness of the sufferings involved therein, he announced His readiness to discharge the greatest undertaking of all. But let us carefully note, once more, how everything is resolved unto the divine WILL. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:9), that will which had been formulated in His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), which had been expressed in the terms of the everlasting covenant, which had been freely accepted by the Mediator Himself, and which had been made known in the Scriptures of truth. That “will” involved the magnifying of God's law and rendering it honourable (Isa 42:21). It involved the Son's becoming the federal Representative of His people, His entering into the office of Surety,

His serving as their Substitute, and His making expiation for their sins. And by that same “will” we are saved. How clearly this confirms what we have said in a previous article.

It would take us too far afield for us now to enter into a discussion of the nature, design, and effects of the atonement, rather must we confine ourselves to the relation which the satisfaction of Christ had unto the demonstrating of God’s governmental perfections under the economy He had instituted. The fundamental feature of that economy is that the Lord God has placed His rational creatures under law, and that He administers this law with strict impartiality, enforcing its sanctions without respect of persons. The climactic proof of this appears in the plan God formed for the salvation of His elect. He did not sovereignly pardon their iniquities without any satisfaction being rendered to His broken law, but appointed His own Son to enter their stead and place and be made a curse for them, experiencing in His own person the unabated penalty of that law, so that they may be righteously discharged. This it is which alone explains the unparalleled sufferings of the Saviour.

What has just been pointed out alone accounts for the agony of our Redeemer prior to the cross. Before any human hand was laid upon Him, before any human enemy came near Him, He exclaimed, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Mat 26:38). Behold Him prostrate in the garden—He was in an agony of mental distress. He sweat great drops of blood, engaged in “strong crying and tears” (Heb 5:7). Observe Him on the cruel tree. With unmeasurable magnanimity He interceded for His crucifiers. With royal majesty and unparalleled mercy He allotted a place in paradise to one of the malefactors dying by His side. But before He yielded up His spirit He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). There is only one adequate cause for such unspeakable anguish, namely, His vicarious character, His bearing imputed sin (for He had none of His own), His undergoing the curse of the law in the stead of those who were justly condemned by it.

Scripture speaks so plainly on this momentous subject that there is no excuse for any misunderstanding of its meaning. Christ was “wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him” (Isa 53:5). And why so? Because God made His Son to be “sin for us, who knew no sin” (2Co 5:21), because “the LORD made the iniquity of us all to meet on him” (see Isa 53:6), because “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24). And what was the consequence? This—JEHOVAH cried, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7). Under the regime God has instituted, sin must be punished wherever it be found and no exception was made even of the spotless Lamb when the iniquities of His people were transferred to Him. Hence we are told that the Sin-bearer was “smitten of God” and again, “it pleased the LORD to bruise him” (Isa 53:4, 10).

It is, then, in the work of redemption that we behold the clearest, the most solemn, and yet the grandest display of God’s righteousness. Therein we learn His estimate of sin, His holy abhorrence of it, the nature and severity of His sentence upon it. Not only does the work of redemption exhibit the exceeding riches of divine mercy in the pardon of deservedly condemned criminals, but it manifests the inexorable and awe-inspiring character of divine justice in the tremendous punishment of sin inflicted upon the Holy Lamb. The more we prayerfully contemplate the Father’s conduct in connection with the obedience and sufferings of His dear Son, the more clearly do we behold Him vindicating the honour of His broken law, satisfying the claims of His penal justice, furnishing incontestable proof of His equity and veracity, and thereby is He set forth as One who is infinitely worthy to superintend the universe and to govern this world.

Finally, the justice of God will be openly manifested at the end of this world, when the present administration terminates—then will be “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5). The ends of justice, so far as they consist in retribution, would be answered by the sentence pronounced upon every individual immediately after death, for it is enough that the state of men in the next world conform to their characters and conduct in this. But the grand assize is designed for the final manifestation of God’s justice before an assembled universe, to bring it out of any obscurity and uncertainty in which it is partly veiled under the varied dispensations of providence, and to demonstrate once and for all that the Ruler of heaven and earth is no respecter of persons. Then shall the books be opened, fair trial accorded, all the evidence adduced and every man shall “receive according to his works” (Rom 2:6). The wicked will then be convicted that each one has received the due reward of his iniquities, while the righteous will exclaim, “Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments” (Rev 16:7).

Let us now endeavour, though very briefly, to improve this important subject in a doctrinal and practical manner. First, such manifestations of the divine justice as have been before us should indeed promote the exercise of deep humility before God in all our devotional intercourse with Him. O fellow-Christian, if we apprehend in any measure this most solemn truth of the divine justice, we must surely feel the propriety of that precept, “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29). There is far more danger of real believers approaching the Father of mercies in a careless, carnal, and formal manner, than there is of them drawing near to Him under the influence of painful timidity or of a desponding temper. We should endeavour to acquire a settled habit of reminding ourselves that the object of our worship is One who is “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders” (Exo 15:11). Such a view of God is adapted to arouse solemnity, excite reverence, and promote submission.

Second, such manifestations of divine justice as have been before us should warm our hearts and enkindle the spirit of praise. O what a difference it makes whether that justice is for or against us. The justice is now for the weakest and most unworthy believer, for the simple but sufficient reason it was against his blessed Redeemer. Payment God cannot twice demand—first at our bleeding Surety’s hand and then again at ours. Because the sword of divine justice was sheathed in the side of the Substitute, I go free. Because He received the wages of sin in my place, my debts are fully discharged. Because He rendered to the law a vicarious obedience which magnified and made it honourable, His perfect righteousness is reckoned to my account. Because I have put my trust in His finished work, I am justified from all things. Surely, then, I must exclaim, “My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day” (Psa 71:15). O what praise and devotion are due Him. “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10).

Third, such manifestations of divine justice as have been before us constitute an unspeakably solemn warning to the unsaved. While the consideration of God’s righteousness must fill believers with peace and joy, yet it is a fearful thing for the Christless to contemplate. It is a justice which is inflexible, inexorable, and immutable. It is a justice which is never set aside by sentimental considerations, and which cannot be bought with promises or bribed by tears. The solemn truth of God’s justice addresses the consciences of those who are secure in their sins, saying, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God” (Jon 1:6). It speaks with the voice of thunder, maintaining the reasonableness of that obedience which the law requires, the equity of the sanctions by which it is enforced, and the inflexibility of the Legislator to execute

His threatened curse upon its transgressors. If God “spared not his own Son” (Rom 8:32), most certainly He will not spare any who finally despise and reject Him. Even now His wrath is upon them (Joh 3:36), and except they repent, soon shall they feel the full force of it in the lake of fire.

## OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee....Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee,” (1Ti 4:13 16). This is an important part of the counsels which the apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to give unto a younger brother in the ministry. Salutory counsels are they at any time, and most pertinent for these evil days, when so many temptations are presented unto the servants of Christ to compromise their holy calling, turn aside to things of secondary importance, and divide their time and energy between matters which relate to the spiritual and eternal and those pertaining to the material and temporal. Such a snare will be avoided if these exhortations are duly taken to heart.

Never was it more essential that ministers of the Gospel should concentrate upon their sacred and distinctive work. Theirs is a full-time task which calls for the exercise of all the gifts which God has bestowed upon them, and the doing with all their might that which the Lord has appointed them to do. “Give thyself wholly to them” (1Ti 4:15) allows for no dissipation of strength, no attempting to serve two masters, no dividing of interests. That which does not minister to the preacher’s own spirituality must be excluded—that which does not contribute unto the effectiveness of his labours, to glorify his Master and edify His people, must he rigidly avoided. Loyalty to Christ and love for those He shed His blood to redeem must exclude every other consideration. This is not to disparage the relative worth of other objects, but is simply insisting that first things are to be put first, not merely on the Lord’s Day, but all through the week as well.

“Give thyself wholly to them” (1Ti 4:15) is what has regulated our own course and magazine policy during the past year. A few of our readers (very few we trust!) may have been disappointed at finding in these pages no articles devoted to the making of comments on current events, no reference to the progress of the war, and no attempts to show the position of present national convulsions in the scheme of divine prophecy. We have not done so because we have not sought to profit from the folly of those who pursued such a course in the last great war. We feel it is altogether outside of our province, because we can perceive no spiritual benefit for the soul, and especially because this word, “Give thyself wholly to them” (1Ti 4:15) (divine things) positively precludes our doing so.

We have therefore endeavoured to remain true to the title of this magazine and give our readers studies in the Scriptures. The contents of Holy Writ are not ephemeral or evanescent, but are of enduring moment, and (if this war continues) will be of unchanging value to God’s people long after the present commotion among the nations is over. The Word of the Lord endures forever and its precepts are pertinent and its principles applicable to each generation that comes and goes. “Give thyself wholly to them” (1Ti 4:15) is as truly the great Commander’s order to each of His officers today as it was in the lifetime of Timothy. Then let us see to it that we heed

the same. By so doing we will not only honour our Master and be of most help to His people, but at the same time render the highest possible service to the State.

True, it has not always been easy to concentrate the mind on spiritual things for protracted periods, nor is it a simple matter to continue writing articles which call for the utmost care while air-raids are in progress, yet the execution of such tasks has enabled us to prove in a new way the sufficiency of divine grace. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2Co 9:8). Yes “all grace”—prompting grace, persevering grace, preserving grace. It has been a constant source of comfort through these trying months to know that God has given us a place in the hearts and prayers of so many of His dear people, and He has certainly responded to their supplications and intercession on our behalf. We are grateful unto each one who has sought to hold up our hands, and ask for a continuance of their loving co-operation.

We have much cause to praise God for His abounding goodness unto us during the past twelve months. Except for slight colds and their attendant inconveniences, the editor and his wife have been preserved in good health all through another year. So far as we have been able to ascertain out of all the thousands of pieces of mail intended for us, or sent out by us to the four corners of the earth, not a single one has been lost—nothing is too small to commit into the keeping of the Lord! Though the number of names on our mailing list is the lowest since we commenced publishing, yet we close the year with the largest credit-balance we have ever had. In spite of advancing apostasy, the increasing exposure of an empty profession, and the spiritual coldness of many of the Lord’s people, there are still a few who welcome that which searches, and refuse not that which condemns them. Letters to hand from far distant parts show that, under God, our labours are not in vain.

And what of the future? That is in the hands of God—but if He spares us, we shall try our best to continue publishing for another year. If our desire is realized, we propose to devote the cover-page articles to the Ten Commandments, for loving obedience unto them lies at the foundation of all genuine piety. The series on the Sermon on the Mount and the Doctrine of Man’s Spiritual Impotency are to be continued, as also those on the life of Elijah. We hope to address a number of articles unto those who make no Christian profession. We have already obtained permission to place this magazine in some of the reading rooms of the Forces, and would ask special prayer on this effort, and that God may grant the “Studies” access to still more in the Services! We expect the 1940 Bound Volume to be ready early in December: 4/3 (one Dollar) post-paid. It will make things easier for us if friends would please order as early as possible. We sincerely trust that none to whom we are now sending two or three copies of each current issue will ask us to send only one. Let each of us seek grace to heed that exhortation, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2). With loving greetings and every good wish, we remain, yours by divine mercy, A. W. and V. E. Pink.

Later. Since writing the above we received a call, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, to once more move our tent. During the last few months, and especially since the German air-raids increased so much both in frequency and intensity, many of our friends have been much concerned about our welfare, and numbers of them suggested our moving to a less vulnerable area. But we did not feel free to accept any of their loving suggestions. It was the Lord who directed us to Hove (which joins on to Brighton) four and a half years ago, and we dared not leave till He made it very clear that His time for us to do so had come. Like Elijah at Cherith, we awaited “the word of the LORD” (see 1Ki 17:3-8). And how gracious He is—He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. Just when the strain was becoming too much for our frail

bodies, our Master made it plain He had provided a haven of rest for us some seven hundred and fifty miles distant.

An old friend in Scotland renewed his kind invitation for us to sojourn with him. It meant travelling across the city of London, and a bomb fell near the station where we were waiting for our train, but we were unharmed. It meant a five hundred mile journey to Glasgow, but we reached it safely, and had a week's rest with dear ones who devotedly ministered to our every need, so that we were much refreshed both spiritually and physically. Then another railway journey of one hundred and seventy miles; a twelve hours' sea trip, which was accomplished without any untoward event. A few days fellowship in the home of another kind friend and his wife, and then a short sea trip and our "haven" was safely reached. We are now situated on an island far removed from the scene of conflict, where we can quietly study and conduct the work of the magazine in peace, and what is still better, we are once more in a place where we can have fellowship with some of the choicest of God's people. Those who may have sent money orders made out to Hove need not worry, for they will be forwarded to us and (D.V.) cashed through our bank.



# APPENDICES

## About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library has republished the *Studies* beginning with the year 1932, available for download worldwide, and in print upon request, up to \$20 value per month. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: [www.chapellibrary.org/periodicals/studiesinthescrptures](http://www.chapellibrary.org/periodicals/studiesinthescrptures)

Other literature: [www.chapellibrary.org/literature/](http://www.chapellibrary.org/literature/)

Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished in paperbacks by several sources. Chapel Library offers the following at the time of this printing:

- *The Sovereignty of God* 176 pages
- *Comfort for Christians* 79 pages
- *Profiting from the Word* 96 pages
- *Seven Sayings of the Savior* 94 pages
- *Spiritual Union and Communion* 175 pages
- *The Attributes of God* 105 pages
- *The Doctrine of Human Depravity* 241 pages
- *The Doctrine of Revelation* 214 pages
- *1 John – An Exposition, Part 1* 190 pages
- *1 John – An Exposition, Part 2* 173 pages
- *The Holy Spirit* 196 pages
- *The Holy Sabbath* 106 pages
- *The Divine Covenants* 356 pages

# Biography of A.W. Pink

by Erroll Hulse

Concerning Calvinism and Arminianism during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

## 1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced Theosophy, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! "Lucifer" was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur's character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A

leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink's conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur, however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had been founded by D. L. Moody in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur's decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently suited to this kind of ministry. Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is

a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. Studies in the Scriptures had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the Studies. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

## **2. Pink's Experience in Australia**

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep Studies in the Scriptures going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people "like a magnet," and that he preached the "whole counsel of God's Word," and was capable of preaching a sermon "from every word of the text."

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, "never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ's vineyard."

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on "Human Responsibility." Sadly, Pink did not realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a

statement that they agreed unanimously not to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink's Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink's wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain Studies in the Scriptures by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism. Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

### **3. Impact of Pink's Writing Ministry**

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical Studies in the Scriptures, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and '70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink's writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (Sovereignty of God, Life of Elijah, and Profiting from the Word) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink's books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in Methodism grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, "Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century."

*A South African by birth, Erroll Hulse gave much of his life to furthering the cause of the gospel and Reformed doctrine in Africa, as well as missions around the world. Through a wide range of mission activities, conference initiatives, and editing Reformation Today magazine, Erroll served as a vital link for Chapel Library to international pastors and missionaries.*

*After conversion to Christ in university, Erroll studied theology at the London Bible College and benefited from the ministry of Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster. His pastorates in the UK include 23 years in Cuckfield, West Sussex, three years in Liverpool, and twenty years as Associate Pastor with a missions mandate at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church. Erroll's life leaves a legacy of passionate prayer for the global cause of Christ, a hunger for Spirit-wrought revival, and ceaseless activity fueled by a love for Christ and the lost.*

*From 1970-2013, Erroll Hulse edited and wrote extensively for Reformation Today magazine, which continues today as a bi-monthly magazine featuring insightful articles relevant to the Reformed community, with news from global mission fields. Visit [www.reformation-today.org](http://www.reformation-today.org) for more information.*

*The Carey Conference is another continuing ministry of Erroll's Reformation Today Trust. This annual conference in the United Kingdom is aimed at equipping pastors, church leaders, and their wives.*

*Erroll and others began the African Pastors' Conferences in 2006 to encourage a recovery of African churches from the influx of the prosperity gospel and syncretism with traditional religions. The conferences operate as a collaborative effort of South African and Zambian Reformed Baptist churches. Reception has been enthusiastic and conferences have spread over many countries in English-speaking Africa. Churches in Africa, UK, and the USA sponsor these conferences by financially "adopting" conferences in specific locations. For more information visit [www.reformation-today.org/african-pastors-conference/](http://www.reformation-today.org/african-pastors-conference/).*

*We are deeply grateful to the Lord for Erroll's life, his fellowship in Christ, partnership in ministry, and passion for global mission endeavors.*

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