

Volume 18—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 1
January, 1939
FIRST THINGS FIRST.

The dawning of a new year is a fresh call unto each of us to put first things first, and it is only by heeding this call that we are prepared to start it aright. The greatest tragedy of life is that the vast majority of our fellows are dissipating their energies on secondary things, spending their strength for that which satisfies not. Alas, how much time have we wasted in the past! But a new year affords us another opportunity to mend our ways: how much of it, then, are we going to improve and conserve for eternity? The answer to that question will be determined by how far we put first things first.

It is one thing to recognize and realize that it is both our duty and wisdom to put first things first, and quite another to actually do so. It is much to be thankful for when light from above makes plain the path wherein we should walk—yet something more than illumination is required in order for us to traverse the same. Strength, power, enablement, is indispensable—and *that* we have not by nature. Have we not already been made painfully aware of this fact? Then have we humbly acknowledged it to God, and sought from Him fresh supplies of grace? Let us say with Jehoshaphat, when the enemies of Israel assembled against them, “O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon *Thee*” (2 Chron. 20:12).

What is it to put first things first? First and supremely to give God Himself His rightful place in our lives and render to Him that which is His due. “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts: *I am the first*, and I am the last” (Isa. 44:6). The great “I am” is self-existent and self-sufficient. Because He is the First, He should be first served. The world had its beginning from Him; we had ours, and therefore at the beginning of the year, and of each day, it deeply concerns us to take Him along with us. God is the sum of all excellence, being inexpressibly blessed in Himself. How He should attract us! God is possessed of infinite benevolence, which is guided by unerring wisdom, and He has all-mighty power at His disposal. What an Object for our most fervent affections! Shall, then, every glittering toy become a rival to this transcendently glorious Being and rob Him of our hearts?

Let us form the habit (if we have not already done so) of directing our first conscious thoughts unto Him who has preserved us through the night. Begin the day by definitely bringing the Lord God before your heart, contemplate His wondrous attributes, prostrate your soul before Him in worship, adore Him for His glorious perfections. Say with holy David, “My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee” (Psa. 5:3). Nor will this be either difficult or irksome if we turn the eyes of our souls unto Him: it is beholding the beauty of the Lord which puts in tune the strings of our harps, and enables us to make melody in our hearts unto Him. Nor is this all: by doing obeisance we promote obedience. By solemnly paying homage to God and rendering to Him the honour which is due His great name, we strengthen the obligations that we lie under to observe His statutes and keep His commandments. By our humble and frequent adoration of His perfections, conformity to His will will be easier, for His authority over us will be more strongly felt.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). God is to be given the preference above all others. Let

not any business prevent our seeking communion with Him nor hinder the maintenance of it. There are many things we would like to do, but other things deter us. We wish to visit a dear friend, but the pressure of other concerns thwarts us. But this must never be the case with our seeking unto *God*: that is the “one thing needful” to which everything else must be made to give way. It is not at all necessary to our highest good that we be great in the world or advance our estate in it to such and such a pitch—but it is absolutely essential that we obtain God’s favour and keep ourselves in His love. No worldly business whatsoever can serve to excuse our attendance upon God; nay, the more important our worldly business be, the more need have we to apply ourselves to God by prayer for His help in and blessing upon it. The closer we keep to God in prayer, the more likely are our affairs to prosper.

Second, to yield ourselves up unreservedly to God. Of the Corinthian saints we read that they “*first* gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5), which should be done by us at the beginning of each day. This means that they (1) gave their hearts to Him, being won by His loveliness; that they (2) surrendered their wills to Him, to be governed by Him; that they (3) devoted their lives to Him, seeking His honour and glory. “In the way of Thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for Thee; the desire of our soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early” (Isa. 26:8, 9). Our desire must be not only towards the good things that He gives, but towards God Himself—His favour and love, the manifestation of His name to us, and the influences of His grace upon us. Our wills are to be surrendered to God, as the servant is yielded to his master’s pleasure, in everything consulting his desires and interests. God’s will is to be our sole rule, His precepts the regulator of all we engage in. Our lives are to be devoted to His glory: acknowledging Him in all our ways, following Him fully as Caleb did.

Third, to keep our hearts with all diligence (Prov. 4:23). It is not enough that our outward conduct be proper—the springs from which it issues must be right. “Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matt. 23:26). The stream itself cannot be sweet if the fountain-head be foul. A corrupt tree will not bear wholesome fruit. Alas, how widely neglected is this inward cleansing! How generally is external reformation substituted for internal mortification. And why is this?—because we are far more concerned about the approval of our fellow-creatures than we are to obtain the approbation of our *Creator*. Our actions come beneath the gaze of man, but the springs from which they proceed are under the scrutiny of God. He who “weigheth the spirits” (Prov. 16:2) demands purity of heart. We are required to judge the motives which actuate us, to make conscience of evil lustings and vain imaginations, to take ourselves to task for wandering thoughts when engaged in Divine worship.

Fourth, to manifest godliness in the family circle: “let them learn first to show piety at home” (1 Tim. 5:4). Here is another God-appointed “*first*” which is most necessary for us all to heed—but we would specially press it upon the attention of those who are so anxious to engage in what they term “service for the Lord.” The “service” which God requires from all of His people is not a running about here and there, asking impertinent questions of total strangers and prattling to them about Divine things, but to be in subjection to Himself, to walk obediently to His Law. To talk to people about Christ is far easier than the task *He* has assigned—to deny self, take up our cross, and follow Him. Actions speak louder than words: it is by our conduct we are to make manifest Whose we

are. Christians are to “show forth” by their *lives* (rather than tell forth with their lips) “the praises of Him who has called them” (1 Peter 2:9). And they are “first to show piety at home,” then in the Church, and then in the world, for if there be no piety in our home life, then all our seeming piety in the Church and before the world is but humbuggery and hypocrisy.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

6. *The Ministerial Office: Matthew 5:13-16.*

“Ye are the salt of the earth.” These words (and those which follow to the end of v. 16), are frequently regarded as being spoken of God’s people at large, but this we think is a mistake. First, because such an interpretation is out of harmony with the immediate context. Last month we called attention to our Lord’s changing of the pronoun in verse 11 from the “they” in verses 1-10 to the “ye.” In verse 10 Christ enumerated the general principle that, “blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” but in verse 11 He made particular application to His own ministers: persecution is the usual experience of God’s people, but it is the *special* portion of *His servants*. Clear confirmation of this distinction is found in verse 12, where the maligned ministers of Christ are bidden to rejoice because, “so persecuted they the *Prophets* which were before you,” not—“the saints,” but the official servants of God.

Thus, the, “Ye are the salt of the earth,” obviously has reference to those who now occupy the same position as did the “Prophets” of old, namely, those called of God to act as His mouthpiece and interpret His will. Additional proof is found in what immediately follows, where after further designating them the “light of the world” Christ added, “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid”—a figure fitly pertinent to the *officers* of Christ, who are made a spectacle to the world. Finally, what is said in verse 15 plainly pertains to the ministers of God rather than to their hearers, for the candle on a candlestick again speaks of official dignity, and the giving “light to all that are in the house” is plainly the one man ministering to the many.

Matthew Henry begins his comments on these verses by pointing out, “Christ had lately called His disciples and told them they should be ‘fishers of men’ (4:19); here He tells them further what He designed them to be—the salt of the earth and lights of the world: that they might indeed be what it was expected they should be.” It is only in recent generations, when the spirit of socialism has invaded the religious realm, that this passage has been promiscuously applied to Christians. The two emblems which Christ here employed are very striking, and their *order* significant. He resembles His ministers to “salt” to *humble* them, for salt is cheap, common, and insignificant—to “light” to *encourage* them, for light is illuminating, conspicuous, elevated.

The passage we are now to ponder forms the second section of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. In it Christ touches upon the office of the Apostles, and therein, (according to their measure), that of all His ministers. It was a distinct division of His address, yet there is a manifest relation between it and the last one: only those whom the Lord pronounces “blessed,” whose characters correspond to that which He portrayed in verses 1-11, are called by Christ to publicly witness for Him. The ministers of God must themselves first be seasoned by the Word: how could they fittingly apply salt to the consciences of others who had never felt the bite of it on their own? The design of these verses, then, is to stir up Christ’s *servants* to diligence and fidelity in declaring the will of God unto saint and sinner alike.

Thus, the first two sections of this Sermon are closely connected. The coherence of our present portion with the former stands thus: Christ had declared that there is a company on earth upon whom the Divine benediction rests. Anticipating the question, How do they attain to and maintain this felicity by such grades of the Spirit, which fits them for that estate? He answers, the preaching of God’s Word is the principal means to work

in the heart those graces to which true happiness is promised. Because this is a high and holy privilege to bring men to this estate, Christ exhorted His ministers unto earnestness in their service by two weighty reasons, drawn from the properties of their work, and propounded by two similitudes.

“Ye are the salt of the earth” (v. 13). “Ye,” that is, those whom I have called to be Apostles and set apart for the work of the ministry. Ye are “salt,” not literally, yet by resemblance; yet not in regard of their persons, but of their *labours*. They are here likened to “salt”: they were to season souls for God by making them savoury in heart and life. From this emblem both ministers and people may learn their respective duties. Ministers are to dispense the Word, both Law and Gospel, in such a way as to express *the qualities of salt*. Now the properties of salt as applied to raw flesh or fresh meats are principally these; first, it will fret and bite, being of a hot and dry nature; second, it makes meat savoury to our taste; third, it preserves meat from putrefaction by drawing out of it superfluous moisture.

Salt is an indispensable necessity of life. It is God’s great antiseptic in a sphere of decay. It is wrought into the very rocks and soil of earth so that the waters filtering through them become purified thereby. It is a necessary element of the blood, which is the life of our bodies. How well-suited is it, then, as a figure of the Truth, by which means the soul is sanctified—for as salt arrests natural corruption, so the Word of God militates against moral corruption. This figure, then, furnishes clear direction to every minister of God as to his *manner of preaching*. Since the Word alone be the savoury salt whereby souls are seasoned for the Lord, then it ought to be dispensed purely and sincerely. If salt be mixed with dust and rubbish it loses its pungency and efficacy, and if the Word be mingled with levity or exciting anecdotes its power is nullified.

This figure plainly warns the minister of his pressing *need of fortitude*. It is “salt” and not sugar-candy he is to employ: something which the ungodly will be more inclined to spit out than swallow with a smile—something which is calculated to bring water to the eyes rather than laughter to the lips. The minister, then, must not expect faithful preaching to be acceptable and popular. It is contrary to nature for those whose consciences are pricked to be pleased with those who wound them. Christ’s servants must be prepared for their hearers to fret and set themselves against what searches out their corruptions. Such displeasure and opposition is a testimony that their ministry is “salt,” that it has bitten into the depravity of their people. Instead of being discouraged and dismayed they are to persevere, endeavouring to season their congregation more and more with the pure salt of God’s Word.

The hearer also is to receive instruction from this figure. Hereby each one may see what he is in himself by nature: depraved and corrupt, as unsavoury flesh and stinking carrion in the nostrils of God, or else what need of *salt*? How this should humble and cause us to lay aside all pride and self-righteousness. Again—everyone must learn hereby to suffer the word of reproof, whereby his secret sins are discovered and denounced. When our conscience is searched we must be willing for salt to be rubbed into it, for mortification necessarily precedes salvation. The hearer must give all diligence to be seasoned with this heavenly salt so that the thoughts of his heart, the words of his mouth, and the actions of his life may be acceptable to God (Col. 4:6). If we sit under the ministry of the Word (oral or written) and be not seasoned thereby, our case is doubly evil.

“But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13). This was brought in by Christ to move His servants unto fidelity and diligence in their ministry by the danger attending the opposite. Infidelity in the ministry is like unsavoury salt: ineffectual, worthless, despicable, subject to a fearful curse. This is the great danger of the pulpit: to become men-pleasers, to yield unto the demand for smooth speaking, to tickle the ears of their auditors with novelties. Such preachers become unsavoury salt, unprofitable in their ministry, failing to season souls so that they are acceptable to God. Salt is useless when it loses its virtue and acrimony. Ministers become such when through lack of prayer and continuous study they fail to increase in spiritual knowledge, or when adopting false doctrine they preach error, or when they cease to denounce sin, or when they fail to practice what they preach.

The greatness of the danger attending ministers who become unfaithful and unprofitable is here pointed out by Christ in His words, “wherewith shall it (i.e. the salt—cf. Mark 9:50) be salted?” Those who depart from fidelity very seldom, and then only with great difficulty, are recovered and restored. Read what is recorded of the false prophets in the Old Testament and of false apostles in the New, and where is there an instance that any *repented*? The same solemn principle is exemplified in the case of almost all those preachers who have forsaken Protestantism and gone over to Rome. How diligently, then, do ministers need to take to heart that injunction, “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” (1 Tim. 4:15, 16). Again—“But thou, O man of God, flee these things (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10); and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (v. 11).

The *unprofitableness* of unfaithful ministers is expressed in the words, “it is thenceforth good for nothing”: just as unsavoury salt is become worthless to season meat, so unfaithful ministers are valueless to God and man. The curse resting upon such is, “it is cast out and trodden under foot of men,” that is, such preachers are condemned both by the Lord and by their fellow men. “Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept My ways, but have been partial in the Law” (Mal. 2:9). Such was the fate pronounced upon the renegade priests of old. No doubt Christ was here making an oblique reference to the scribes and Pharisees of His day, affirming their unprofitableness and announcing the impending doom of Judaism. Solemn beyond words is this verse, and prayerfully should it be laid to heart by all Christian ministers.

“Ye are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Here Christ likens His ministers unto “light,” and that, with the object of stirring them up to preach the will of God. It was as though He said, Your position and condition is such that your sayings and doings are open to the cognizance of man, therefore be careful to please God therein. Spiritually the world is in darkness (2 Peter 1:19) and sits in the shadow of death (Matt. 4:16), because in Adam it turned away from Him who is Light. But ministers of the Word carry with them a Lamp of Truth, and by the illumination of their ministry are they to shine upon the benighted souls of men. By their preaching, ignorance is to be exposed, that their hearers may be “turned from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18).

By this figure Christ shows *how* the Word is to be *handled*: it is to be so applied to the minds and consciences of men that they may be made to see their sins and their woeful wretchedness thereby, then bringing before them the remedy for their misery, which is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus; and then to make plain that path of obedience in all good duties to God and men which He requires in the life of a Christian. Preachers may display great homiletic skill and deliver flowery discourses, but only true preaching conveys the light of spiritual knowledge to the heart and leads souls to God. So, too, since true ministers are the light of the world it is incumbent upon all who hear them to raise the blinds of carnal prejudice and open the windows of their souls so that the illuminating message may receive due entrance.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house” (Matt. 5:14, 15). Such is the case with God’s ministers by virtue of their calling. Christ has denominated His servants, “the light of the world,” and they may be inclined to regard themselves as men of some renown, and therefore He informs them His *intent therein*. It was not to give them titles of praise, to puff them up, but to acquaint them with the demands of their office: by reason of their high calling they would be public spectacles—heard and scrutinized by men—and therefore it doubly behooves them to see to it that their message is acceptable to God and their walk blameless before men, for if by their fidelity they may “turn many to righteousness,” *infidelity* will involve souls in eternal destruction.

Hereby God’s ministers must learn not to think it strange if they lie more open to manifold reproaches and abuses of the world than do the rank and file of God’s people: the more godly their conduct be, the more distasteful to the unregenerate. Hence it follows that God’s servants cannot without great sin hide the gifts and talents which He has bestowed upon them, for they are as lighted candles which must not be put under a bushel. That may be done in various ways: by refusing to humble themselves and speak in terms suited to the capacity of the most simple; by refusing to give out the Truth of God; by toning it down through the fear of man; by flirting with the world and adopting its ways.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (v. 16). By “so shine” is signified ministerial teaching, whereby God’s will and grace is made known to His people, backed up by a godly example. Seeing that by your calling you are so conspicuous in the world, look well to the holiness of your lives and the fruit of your labours, so that God’s people may not only hear your doctrine but also perceive your good works, and thereby be moved to follow the same, and thus bring honour and praise to the Lord. These two things must never be separated: sound doctrine and holy deportment are ever to be conjoined in a minister. He who teaches to write will give rules of writing to the scholars, and then set before them a copy to follow. God will have men learn His will in two ways: by *hearing and seeing*—cf. 1 Timothy 4:12.

In regard to this double charge which lies on every minister, his hearers (or readers) must for their part remember in their prayers to crave of God that their pastors may be Divinely enabled to preach to them by lip and life. It is striking to note how often Paul required the churches to which he wrote to *pray* for him in regard of his ministry: see Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 6:19. If, then, the chief of the Apostles had

need to be prayed for, how much more so the ordinary minister of God! Great reason is there for this, for the Devil stood at the right hand of Israel's high priest to resist him (Zech. 3:1). Though he opposes every Christian, yet he aims especially at the minister to cause him to fail, if not in his teaching, then in his conduct.

“That they may see your good works”: your sincerity, fidelity, love, self-sacrifice, perseverance, zeal, etc. “And glorify your Father which is in Heaven”: this is the chief, though not the whole, end of good works—subordinately, they enrich ourselves and benefit our fellows. As regards God they serve, first, as means whereby we give evidence of our homage by obeying His commands. Second, they serve as tokens of our gratitude for all His mercies, both spiritual and temporal, for thankfulness is to be expressed by life as well as lip. Third, they serve to make us followers of God, who hath bidden us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16), and to put into practice the duties of love to our neighbour. This must be the main aim of the minister: to bring men to glorify God. Though the unregenerate are quite capable of perceiving the minister's failures, it is only real Christians who can discern his spiritual graces and the fruit thereof, as it is they alone who will glorify the Father because of the same. Probably the Day to come will reveal that few things have evoked so much genuine praise to God as His people's returning thanks for the piety, integrity, and helpfulness of His servants, who untiringly sought their good.—A. W. P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID.

85. *His Last Words.*

The passage for our present consideration (2 Sam. 23:1-7) presents somewhat of a difficulty, especially to those who are not accustomed to the drawing of distinctions and the taking of words relatively as well as absolutely. It opens by telling us, "These be the last words of David," when, in fact, the close of the Patriarch's life was not yet reached. It seems strange that we should read of this *here*, when so much else is recorded in the chapters which follow, for we naturally associate the "last words" of a person with his closing utterances as life is expiring. Nor is the difficulty decreased when we note what vastly different language is upon David's lips in 1 Kings 2:9. Thomas Scott suggested that, "perhaps he repeated them in his dying moments as the expression of his faith and hope and the source of his consolation." This may be the case, for very likely such sentiments were in his heart and mouth again and again during his declining days.

However, it seems to us that 2 Samuel 23 refers to "the last words of David" not so much as those merely of a *man*, but rather as being a *mouthpiece* of God, thus forming a brief appendix to his Psalms. That our passage concerns the final inspired utterance of David appears to be quite plain from the specific terms used in it. First, he makes definite mention of himself as "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" (v. 1), which obviously refers to his official character as the Lord's servant and seer. Second, he states, "the Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and His Word was in my tongue" (v. 2), which language could only be used of one appointed to formally deliver the oracles of God, of one so completely controlled by the Holy Spirit that his utterance was a Divine revelation. Third, what he said in verses 3 and 4 looked beyond himself, being a prophetic announcement concerning the antitypical "Ruler"—proof that he was "moved by the Holy Spirit." Further, there is nothing in the chapters following which indicate David was giving forth a formal utterance by Divine revelation.

There is still another distinction which may be drawn, that clears away any remaining difficulty from our passage. Not only are we to distinguish between David's utterances as a man and as the mouthpiece of Jehovah, but also between his acts and words looked at *historically* and considered *typically*. In the course of this lengthy series, we have pointed out again and again that in many (though by no means in all) of his experiences, David is to be viewed *representatively*, as treading the same path and encountering the temptations and trials common to all the saints as they pass through this wilderness of sin. 1 Kings 1 gives us the historical close of the Patriarch's life, the last utterance of the aged king being, "but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave *with blood*." "Blood" is the final word on the lips of the dying warrior, a "man of war" from his youth, as Philistine enemies and Amalekite foes could testify.

But in 2 Samuel 23 we are permitted to gaze upon the other side of the picture, a most blessed and refreshing one. Here, the Spirit of God brings before us not, "the man of war," (1 Sam. 16:18), but, "the man after God's own heart"—the one who had found favour in His eyes and had been loved with an everlasting love, and thus the representative of His chosen people. Here we listen to the holy breathings of the saint, and the scene becomes to us a "gate of Heaven." As the believer draws near the end of his wilderness journey, like David, he reviews the Lord's goodness, dwells upon the amazing grace which lifted him from the dunghill and made him to sit in the heavenlies in Christ (2 Sam. 23:1), and while he laments the spiritual condition of some near and dear to him

and his own failure to grow in grace as he ought, yet he found unspeakable comfort in the fact that God had made with him an Everlasting Covenant.

“Now these be the last words of David” (2 Sam. 23:1). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out that, “When we find death approaching, we should endeavour both to honour God and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those who have had long experience of God’s goodness and the peacefulness of wisdom’s ways, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise.” It is not all who are granted a clear token of their approaching dissolution or given a season of consciousness, so that they may clearly avow their faith and hope; but when such is afforded, their duty and privilege is plain. David thus acquitted himself to the glory of God and the comfort of His people, and everything else being equal, so should we.

“David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said” (v. 1). The Hebrew word for “said” (twice used in this verse) signifies to speak with assurance and authority, thus confirming what we have pointed out above concerning the Divine character of this utterance. David described himself, first, by the lowliness of his origin—“the son of Jesse,” unknown amongst those arrayed in purple and fine linen. The stock from which he came was indeed an humble one, for when it was asked in Saul’s court, “whose son is he?” the answer was returned, “O king, I cannot tell” (1 Sam. 17:55)—and so David had to answer for himself, “I am the son of thy servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite” (v. 58)—a small and despised house, and he the least in that house. Typically speaking, this is the believer owning his humble origin, looking back to the hole of the pit from which he was digged.

“And the man that was raised up on high” (2 Sam. 23:1): here he makes mention, secondly, of the dignity of his elevation. Though of such mean parentage, from one of the humblest of Saul’s subjects, yet he found favour in the sight of the Lord, being exalted to the throne and made ruler over all Israel. The nearer the believer approaches the close of his life, the more is his heart made to wonder at the sovereign grace of God for laying hold of one so utterly unworthy and raising him to a position of dignity and honour above that occupied by the holy angels. Third, David described himself as, “the anointed of God”: as such he was again the typical believer, for of Christians it is written, “Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath *anointed* us, is God” (2 Cor. 1:21). Finally, “and the sweet Psalmist of Israel”: that, of course, refers to his official character, and yet this, too, is representative: though he composed the Psalms, they are for our use (James 5:13).

“The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and His word was in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). Though it be useless for us to attempt any explanation of the rationale of Divine inspiration, yet this is one of many statements found in Holy Writ which serves to define its nature and extent. When we come face to face with the conjunction of the Divine and the human, we confront that which transcends the grasp of the finite mind; nevertheless, by the aid of what is revealed, we may make certain postulates, so as to guard against error at either extreme. The Scriptures are indeed the very Word of God, inerrant and imperishable, yet the instrumentality of the creature was employed in the communication and compilation of them. The mouth uttering it was human, but the message was Divine; the voice was that of man, but the actual words those of God Himself.

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Those holy men were the actual mouthpieces of the Almighty: their utterances were so absolutely controlled by Him that what they said and wrote was a perfect expression of His mind and will. It is not simply that their minds were elevated or their spirits sublimated, but that their very tongues were regulated. It was not merely that their wills received a supernatural impulse or that their minds were Divinely illuminated, but the very words of their message was conveyed to them. Nothing less than this can be gathered from the verse before us: when David affirmed God’s Word was “in his tongue,” far more is denoted than that a concept was conveyed to his mind and he left free to express it in his own language. Nothing less than their *verbal inspiration* is predicated of the Scriptures themselves—compare 1 Corinthians 2:13.

“The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Sam. 23:3). The older writers saw in these verses, and we believe rightly so, a reference to the blessed Trinity. First, in verse 2 David affirmed, “the Spirit of the Lord spake by me,” and that a Divine Person rather than a spiritual inflation was denoted is plain from, “and *His* word was in my tongue.” Second, “the God of Israel said,” that is, God the Father spake, as a reference to Hebrews 1:1, 2 makes clear. Third, “the Rock of Israel spake to David,” alludes to the Son, in His mediatorial capacity, of whom it was predicted, “And a Man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great *rock* in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). Though a fuller and brighter manifestation of the Godhead has been made under Christianity, nevertheless the Tri-unity of God was definitely revealed in the *Old Testament* Scriptures.

There is a distinction to be drawn between what is recorded in the verse preceding and in verse 3: there it was, “the Spirit of the Lord spake *by* me”—here “spake *to* me”—that relates to what he was moved to record by Divine inspiration (principally in the Psalms), this, a more personal message for himself and family. “Let ministers observe that those by whom God speaks to others are concerned to hear and heed what the Spirit speaks to themselves. They whose office it is to teach others their duty, must be sure to learn and do their own” (Matthew Henry). Particularly must due attention be paid unto these two things: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” The immediate reference is to civic leaders, but the principle applies strictly to ecclesiastical ones too: impartiality and righteousness ought ever to characterize both magistrate and minister alike, while the office of each is to be discharged in the awe of Him to whom an account will yet have to be rendered.

“And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain” (2 Sam. 23:4). Here is the blessing and prosperity assured to those who faithfully discharge their obligations, keeping both tables of the Law. “Light is sweet and pleasant, and he that does his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince (or minister) is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honour. Light is a blessing, nor are there greater and more extensive blessings to the public than princes that rule in the fear of God. It is like ‘the light of the morning,’ which is most welcome after the darkness of the night; so was David’s government after Saul’s. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produces for the service of men; it brings with it a harvest of blessings” (Matthew Henry).

Verses 3 and 4 can also be rightly regarded as a Messianic prophecy, for the Hebrew may be rendered, "There shall be a Ruler over men which is just, ruling in the fear of God." The qualities essential in the one who is to rule for God's glory and His people's good, are righteousness and dependence—found alone in their perfection in that blessed One who came not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. Saul wielded the power for himself; David had to hang his head and own, "my house be not so with God" (v. 5); which requires us to turn to Christ. He orders the affairs of the Father's kingdom according to the Divine will. He is "as the light of the morning," because He is "the Light of the world," and "as the tender grass," because He is "the Branch of the LORD" and the Fruit of the earth (Isa. 4:2).

"Although my house be not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:5). Here, again, the historical merges into the typical. After the prophetic foreview just granted him, David turned his reflections upon himself and his own house, and sorrowed over the state of the same. "By his own misconduct, his family was much less religious and prosperous than it might have been expected, and both he and Israel had suffered many things in consequence. Several grievous and scandalous events had occurred: matters were not yet as he could wish, and he seems to have had his fears concerning his descendants, who should succeed him in the kingdom" (Thomas Scott). Grief, then, was mingled with his joy, and dismal forebodings cast a dark shadow over his lot.

As the believer nears the end of his course, he not only meditates upon the lowliness of his original estate and then the elevated position to which sovereign grace has lifted him, but he also reviews his follies, bemoans his failures, and sorrows over the wretched returns he has made unto God's goodness. This is the common experience of the pious: as they journey through this wilderness they are sorely tried and exercised, pass through deep waters, experience many sharp conflicts, and are often at a loss to maintain their faith.

"Favour'd saints of God,
His messengers and seers,
The narrow path have trod,
'Mid sins, and doubts, and fears."

And at the end they generally have to mourn over the graceless condition of some that are nearest and dearest to them, and exclaim, "Although my house be not so with God."

"Yet He hath made with me an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (v. 5). Blessed antithesis. The opening "yet" is placed over against the "although" at the beginning of the previous clause: it is the faithfulness of God set in delightful contrast from David's failures. It illustrates most solemnly the awe-inspiring sovereignty of God: Divine justice had been meted out to his foes, Divine grace had dealt with himself. At least one of his children had evidenced himself to be among the reprobate, but God had entered into an eternal compact of peace with the father. Here was indeed sweet consolation for his poor heart. The allusion is to that Covenant of Grace which God made with all His people in Christ before the foundation of the world. That covenant is from everlasting in its contrivance, and to everlasting in its consequences.

That Everlasting Covenant is so "ordered" as to promote the glory of God, the honour of the Mediator, and the holiness and blessing of His people. It is "sure" because its promises are those of Him who cannot lie, because full provision is made in it for all the failures of believers, and because its administration is in the hands of Christ. "For this is

all my salvation.” David rightly traced his salvation back to “the Everlasting Covenant”: alas that so many today are ignorant of this inexhaustible well of comfort. It is not enough that we go back to the hour when we first believed, nor even to the Cross where the Saviour paid the price of our redemption—to the Everlasting Covenant we must look, and see there God graciously planning to give Christ to die for His people and impart the Spirit to them for quickening and the communicating of faith. This is “all our salvation” for it entirely suffices, containing as it does a draft of all the salvation-acts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In consequence of the nature, fullness, and sufficiency of the Everlasting Covenant, it must be “all my desire”: that is, obtaining by the Spirit’s help an assurance of my personal interest in its grand promises. “Although He make it not to grow.” First, with reference to his house: “in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow, or not to grow” (cf. Psa. 107:41). Good men have often the melancholy prospect of a declining family, David’s house was typical of the Church of Christ. “Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish: suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened by errors and corruptions, yea, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church’s Head, that He will preserve to Him a seed: this our Saviour comforted Himself with in His sufferings: Isaiah 53:10, 12” (Matthew Henry). Second, with reference to himself: he had received the grace of the covenant, but it had not flourished in him as could be desired—his own neglect being the criminal cause.

David concluded (2 Sam. 23:6, 7) with a most solemn reference to the awful fate awaiting the reprobate. Destitute of faith, self-willed, unconcerned about God’s glory, despising and ill-treating His servants, righteous retribution shall surely fall upon them. “As thorns thrust away” is a figure of their rejection by God; ultimately they shall be “utterly burnt with fire.” It was a prediction of the eternal undoing of all the implacable enemies of Christ’s kingdom.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

8. *Its Manifestation.*

By His electing act God took the Church into a definite and personal relation to Himself, so that He reckons and regards its members as His own dear children and people. Consequently, even while they are in a state of nature, *before* their regeneration, He views and owns them as such. This is very blessed and wonderful, though, alas, it is a truth which is almost unknown in present-day Christendom. It is now commonly assumed that we only become the children of God when we are born again, that we have no relation to Christ until we have embraced Him with the arms of faith. But with the Scriptures in our hands there is no excuse for such ignorance, and woe be unto those who deliberately repudiate their plain testimony: to their Divine Author will they yet have to answer for such wickedness.

It seems strange that the very ones who are foremost in propagating (unwittingly, we would believe) the error alluded to above, are they who have probably said and written more upon the typical teaching of the book of Exodus than anyone else. We would ask such, were not the Hebrews definitely owned by God as belonging to Him *before* He sent Moses to deliver them from the house of bondage—before the blood of the paschal lamb was shed, yea, while they were utterly idolatrous (Ezek. 20:5-9)? Verily, for to Moses He declared, “I have surely seen the affliction of *My People* which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows” (Exo. 3:7); and of Pharaoh He demanded, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let *My people* go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness” (5:1). And the Hebrews were a Divinely ordained type of the Israel of God, the spiritual election of grace!

It is quite true that God’s elect are “*by nature* the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3), nevertheless, their *persons* have been loved by Him with an everlasting love. Consequently, before the Spirit is sent to quicken them into newness of life, the Lord God contemplates and speaks of them as His own. As this is now so little known, we will pause and offer proof from the Word. First, God calls them His *children*: “All Thy children shall be taught of the LORD” (Isa. 54:13)—His children *before* taught by Him. And again—“He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52)—His children *before* “gathered” by Him. Second, He designates them *His people*. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Psa. 110:3)—His people before “made willing”; “I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee, for I *have* much people in this city” (Acts 18:10)—before Paul preached the Gospel in that heathen center.

Third, Christ denominates God’s elect *His sheep* before they are brought into the fold: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring” (John 10:16)—who were those “other sheep” but those of His elect among the Gentiles? Fourth, the elect are spoken of as *the tabernacle of David* while they are in the ruins of the Fall: “God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the Prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down” (Acts 15:14-16). In the apostolic age God began to take out of the Gentiles a people for His name, and concerning this Amos had prophesied of old: “The Tabernacle of David, that is, the elect of God, once stood in Adam with the non-elect, and with them they fell; but the Lord will set up

His elect again, not in the first Adam, but in the second Adam, in whom they shall be for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (James Wells).

Love in the heart of God was a secret in Himself from everlasting, being wholly unknown before the world began, except to Christ, God-man, yet it had been exercised towards the whole election of grace. Though they were beloved with such a love as contained the uttermost of God’s good will unto them, and to the uttermost of blessing, grace and glory, yet it was in such a way and manner that for a season they were altogether unacquainted with the same. Though the acts of God’s will in Christ’s Person concerning them and upon them were such as could never cease, nevertheless they were to be in a state for a season in which none of them were to be opened and made known to them. All was in the incomprehensible mind of Jehovah from everlasting, and the same it will be to everlasting—but the revelation and manifestation of the same has been made at different times and in various degrees.

The various conditions in which God’s elect find themselves not only exhibit the manifold wisdom of God, but illustrate our last remark above. The elect were to be in a creature state of purity and holiness; as such they were made naturally in Adam. From that they fell into a state of sin and misery, sharing the guilt and depravity of their federal head. They were to be brought therefrom into a redeemed state by the atoning work of Christ, and given a knowledge of this through the quickening and sanctifying operations of the Spirit. After their earthly course is finished they are brought into a sinless state, while they rest from their labours and await the consummation of their salvation. In due course they shall be brought into the resurrection state, and from thence into the state of everlasting glory and unutterable bliss.

In like manner there are different stages in the unfolding of God’s eternal purpose concerning His people. The principle of Divine election has operated from the beginning of human history. No sooner did the Fall take place than the Lord announced the line of distinction which was drawn between the woman’s Seed and the seed of the Serpent, first exemplified in the clear-cut case of Cain and Abel (1 John 3:12). In an earlier article of this series we called attention to the continuous operation of this selective principle, as was seen in the families of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and later still more conspicuously in the separating of Israel from all other nations, as the people of Jehovah’s choice and the objects of His special favour. But what we would now consider is not so much the operation of God’s eternal purpose of grace, as the *manifestation* of it.

In all these states through which the elect are ordained to pass, the love of God is exercised and displayed toward them and upon them, agreeably to the good pleasure of His will. The secret and everlasting love of God to His chosen and His open disclosure of the same, though distinct parts, are one and the same love. The first act of God’s love to the persons of those whom He chose in Christ consisted in giving them being *in Christ*, well-being in Christ from everlasting: *that* was the fundamental act of all grace and glory, for God then “blessed them with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies” (Eph. 1:3). The love of God in His own heart towards the Person of Christ, the Head of the whole election of grace, cannot be expressed, and His love towards the persons of the elect in Christ is so great and infinite that the Scriptures themselves declare “it passeth knowledge.” The open expression and manifestation of this love is now our design to ponder.

First, *the incarnation and mission of Christ*: “In this was *manifested* the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might

live through Him” (1 John 4:9). Take notice of *the persons* unto whom the love of God was thus manifested, expressed in the word, “us.” This is a term made use of by the sacred writers to include and express the saints of God. It is a distinguishing excellence of the Apostles that they bring home their subjects with all their energy to the minds of saints, and then apply them so that hereby the Truth might be felt in all its vast importance. Let the subject be election, redemption, effectual calling or glorification, and most generally they use the term “us,” as thereby including themselves and all the believers to whom they wrote. This serves fitly to evince that all of them are alike interested in all the blessings and benefits of grace, which opens the way for them to appropriate and enjoy the good of them in the Scriptures.

To illustrate what has just been pointed out: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed *us* with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen *us* in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. In love having predestinated *us* unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ . . . to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made *us* accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:3-6). In that passage the repeated “us”

shows the interest which *all* the saints have in their eternal election in Christ. With respect to effectual calling the Apostle uses the word “us” in Romans 9:23, 24. So in connection with salvation (note the “us” in 2 Tim. 1:9) and glorification (see Eph. 2:7 and Rom. 8:18). Let it be carefully observed that whereas this repeated “us” in the Epistles includes the whole election of grace, yet it excludes all others and cannot with any truth or propriety be applied to any but the called of God in Christ Jesus.

We next consider in what this open manifestation of the love of God consisted, namely, in the incarnation and mission of Christ. In the infinite mind of Jehovah, all His love concerning the persons of the elect was conceived from everlasting, with the various ways and means by which the same should be displayed and made known in a time state, so that the Church might be the more sensibly taken therewith. As it pleased the Lord, notwithstanding His eternal love to His people in Christ, to will their fall from a state of creature purity into depravity, so also their redemption from the same was predetermined. An Everlasting Covenant transaction took place between the Father and the Son, wherein the latter engaged to assume human nature and act as their Surety and Redeemer. His incarnation, life and death were fixed upon as the means of their salvation. This became the subject of Old Testament prophecy: that Christ was to be manifested in the flesh, with what He was to do and suffer, in order to take away sin and bring in everlasting righteousness.

That which was revealed in the Scriptures of the Prophets concerning Christ made it fully evident that it was of God that the whole of it was originally conceived in Heaven before time began—the fruit of consultation between Jehovah and the Branch, of which the eternal Spirit was witness. He communicated the same to holy men, who spoke as they were moved by Him, for He searches all things, even the deep things of God. In the Person of Immanuel, God with us, by His open incarnation and the salvation He wrought out and most honourably completed, all the love of the blessed Trinity is reflected most gloriously. God has shone forth in all the greatness and majesty of His love upon His Church in Christ, and thus displayed His everlasting good will unto them. He has so loved them as to give His only begotten Son. This is clearly set forth in His Word, so that

it is all-sufficient to keep up a lively sense thereof in our minds, as the Spirit is pleased to maintain a believing knowledge of it in our hearts.

A brief word upon the *end* of this manifestation of the love of God as spoken of in 1 John 4:9: it is “that we might live through Him.” “It is through the incarnation and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ that we live through Him a life of justification, peace, pardon, acceptance, and access to God. The elect of God in their fallen state were all sin, corruption, misery and death; in these circumstances God commendeth His love toward them, in that whilst they were yet sinners Christ died for them. He by His death removed their sins from them. He loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and brought them nigh unto God, so that herein the Father’s everlasting love of them is most distinctly evidenced” (S. E. Pierce, to whose lovely sermon on 1 John 4:9 we here gladly acknowledge our indebtedness).

A most striking parallel with the Scripture we have looked at above is the statement made by the Lord to His Father in John 17:6: “I have *manifested* Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me.” The manifesting of the name of God, or the secret mystery of His mind and will, could only be performed by Christ, who had been in the bosom of the Father from everlasting, and who became incarnate in order to make visible Him who is invisible. It was the office and work of the Messiah to open the “hidden wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:7), to unlock the holy of holies, to declare what had been kept secret from the foundation of the world; and here in John 17 He declares that He had faithfully discharged it. But mark well how the “us” of 1 John 4:9 is here defined—as “the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world.” Yes, it was to them Christ manifested God’s ineffable name.

In John 17 Christ opened the whole heart of God, making known His everlasting love as was never revealed before. Therein He expounded the good will which the Father bore to the elect in Christ Jesus, in a manner sufficient to fill the spiritual mind with knowledge and understanding, even such as was calculated to lead to an entire trust and confidence in the Lord for all the blessings of this life and that which is to come. And who could give this information but Himself? He came down from Heaven with this express end and design. He was the great Prophet over the House of God. He had the key of all the treasury of grace and glory. In Him personally was hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). By the “Name” of God is meant all that He is in a manifestative and communicative way. It is His love to the Church, His covenant relation to His people in Christ, the eternal delight of His heart to them, which Christ has been pleased to so fully reveal.

It is by the Lord’s admitting us into the knowledge of Himself that we are led to know our election of God. The true apprehension of this is a ground for joy, therefore did Christ say, “Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven” (Luke 10:20). As we cannot know that we are the beloved of God but by believing on His Son, so this is the fruit of spiritual knowledge. Christ has the key of knowledge and opens the door of faith, so that we receive Him as revealed in the Word. It is He, who by His Spirit, is pleased to shed abroad the love of God in the heart. He gives the Spirit to make a revelation of the Everlasting Covenant to our minds, and thereby we are made to know and feel the love of God to be the fountain and spring of all grace and everlasting consolation. As Jehovah caused all His goodness to pass before Moses and showed him His glory (Exo. 33:19), so He admits us into the knowledge of Himself as “The Lord God merciful and gracious.”

Second, *by a supernatural call*. We have somewhat anticipated this in the last two paragraphs, but must now consider it more distinctly. A saint's being called is the first immediate fruit and breaking forth of God's purpose of electing grace. "The river ran underground from eternity and rises and bubbles up therein first, and then runs above ground to everlasting. It is the initial and grand difference which God puts between man and man, the first mark which He sets upon His sheep, whereby He owns them and visibly signifies that they are His" (Thomas Goodwin). "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called" (Rom. 8:30). The original benefit was His predestination of us, and the next blessing is His calling of us. The same order is observed in, "Who hath saved us and called us . . . according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). The eternal purpose is made evident in time by a Divine *call*.

Another Scripture which presents this same truth are those well-known words, "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). It is not our faith nor our justification which is here specifically singled out, but our "*calling*," which we are bidden to "make sure," for thereby our election will be attested to us, that is, confirmed to our faith. It is not that election is not sure without it, for "the foundation of God (His eternal decree) standeth sure" (2 Tim. 2:19) before our calling; but hereby it is certified unto our faith. Thus the Apostles speak one uniform language, and therefore when writing to believers show that the two terms are co-extensive. Thus, Paul—"To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, *called* to be saints"—saints by calling (Rom. 1:7). Peter unto "the church that is at Babylon, *elected* together with you" (1 Peter 5:13). The terms are equivalent, the Apostles acknowledging none other to be true "*calling*" but what was the immediate proof of election, being commensurate to the same persons.

It is indeed blessed to observe—so graciously has the Spirit condescended to stoop and help our infirmity—how frequently this precious truth is reiterated in the Word, so that there might be no room whatever for doubt on the point. "The Lord hath appeared unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). Two things are here affirmed, and the intimate and inseparable relation between them is emphatically stated. First, the everlasting love of God unto His own; second, the effect and showing forth of the same. It is by the Spirit's effectual call the elect are brought out of their natural state of alienation and drawn to God in Christ. That supernatural call or drawing is here expressly attributed to the Lord's "loving kindness," and the connection between this and His everlasting love for them is pointed by the "therefore." Thus, it is by means of God's reconciling us to Himself that we obtain proof of His everlasting good will toward us.—A.W.P.

THE HOLY SABBATH.

1. *Introduction.*

Two things are absolutely essential for the maintenance of vital godliness: the profession of its truth and the practice or exercise of its power, for they mutually assist each other. Where there is no profession of faith in its truth, none will express its power in obedience; and without obedience, profession is worthless. Clearly is this exemplified in connection with the Holy Sabbath. In proportion as the pulpit has failed to insist on and press the claims of the Sacred Day, vital godliness has been weakened and all but destroyed, and commensurate with the growth of an empty profession has been the decay of genuine piety. Things have now come to such a deplorable pass that we may well exclaim, "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14), yea, is being ruthlessly trampled under foot, not only by the masses in general but also by the great majority of those in high places. It is therefore incumbent upon all who fear and love God to do whatever lies within their power to rescue the Sabbath from its present profanation.

Whatever furnishes help, according to the revealed will of God, in the promotion of good works, is greatly to be valued, especially so in a time when the profession of the Truth is being so widely called into question, and its practice not only neglected but despised. Now nothing is so well calculated to accomplish this end than the solemn observance of a weekly day of rest, hallowed unto God, for that lies at the very foundation of all true piety. Rightly did John Owen affirm, "Amongst all the outward means of conveying to the present generation that rule which was at first taught and delivered by Jesus Christ and His Apostles, there hath been none more effectual than the universal uninterrupted observance of such a day for the celebration of the religious worship appointed in the Gospel. The profession of our Christian religion in the world at this day doth depend upon it. How much it tends to the exercise and expression of the power of religion cannot but be evident to all, unless they be such as hate it."

The Lord's Day has ever been a precious boon to all genuine Christians. Occupied as most of them are with worldly concerns during the remainder of the week, they feel that but for this merciful restraint of one day in seven devoted to the worship and service of God, they would soon become wholly absorbed in the things of time and sense. But the Sabbath and its holy exercises restores the claims of God to an ascendancy over their minds. On this day they are led to examine their spiritual progress, reflect upon their duties, meditate on the grand truths of Divine revelation, and prepare for eternity. By faithfully discharging the obligations of this Sacred Day their souls are cleansed from the defilement contracted during the week, their affections raised unto things above, and new strength is obtained for the engagements which lie before them. Christians generally know full well that they owe much of their growth in grace to the blessings of the Sabbath.

Again—attention should be called to the vast amount of benevolent Christian effort which has resulted from the instrumentality of the Sabbath. It has been pertinently pointed out, "If all those who have to secure their livelihood by bodily or mental exertion were obliged to labour through seven days of the week as they now labour through six of them, how few would have time or strength to visit the poor, to teach the young, or to speak of Christ to the ungodly! But through this ordinance of the Sabbath hundreds of thousands of persons in this country, who devote six days to hard labour, bodily or mental, give a part of their Sabbath to the religious instruction of the young and ignorant.

Without the Sabbath, nearly all the inappreciable good which is now done by Sabbath Schools, and much of that which attends the visiting of the sick and distressed in cities, would vanish from the land" (W. B. Noel).

"The Sabbath was made for man": God has graciously sanctified it for the good of the whole world. It is highly probable that more persons are converted to the Lord on that day than all the other six together. When anyone is awakened to a concern about his soul, he naturally looks forward to the return of that time when he can most successfully seek his spiritual good. Moreover, how many there are who, though not earnestly inquiring after God, yet attend public worship, and there learn much of the letter of Scripture and acquire some respect for its authority, who otherwise would grow up as heathens. Furthermore, since the Sabbath alone releases hundreds of the disciples of Christ from secular labours to employ a part of their energies in the instructing of the ignorant, who can say how much of the religious knowledge and moral principle which still exists in our nation, is instrumentally due to the institution of this Sacred Rest?

Godliness has never flourished in the world from its foundation till now, nor will it ever do so, without a due attendance upon this Divine ordinance, and it requires very little perspicuity to foresee what increasing disorder and disaster will yet ensue if it be totally disregarded. It is an incontestable fact that the times when the Sabbath's sanctity was most faithfully proclaimed and maintained in the British Isles—and we may add, in the U.S.A.—were those in which true spirituality was healthiest and vital godliness was in its most flourishing state. The men to whom, under God, we owe this, are the ones whose writings are still among the most precious treasures of English religious literature. A right observance of the Lord's Day lies at the foundation of national happiness and prosperity. So prolific of good is this blessed day that its powerful influences on the well-being of our kingdom vitally affects its spiritual intelligence, the morality of its social order, and the liberties of its people.

So far, then, from the Sabbath law being a heavy burden which God has laid on His creatures, it is a noble boon and an inestimable blessing. So far from its being an unkind deprivation of our liberty, its right observance makes for an entrance into real spiritual freedom. "God blessed the seventh day" (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath was Divinely designed, from its original institution, to be a day of blessing to all who duly observed it. Therefore has the Lord declared, "*Blessed is the man that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it*" (Isa. 56:2): it is not a day of irksome restraint, but one of peace and good. It is a gracious gift whereby, in the midst of our toils, we are granted a deliverance even from that curse, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Gen. 3:19). Man's Maker has mercifully secured to him one seventh portion of his whole life wherein he may rest his wearied body and refresh his needy soul, by separating himself from the toil of this life and fixing his contemplation on the life to come.

The great excellence of this Divine grant lies not, as many seem to suppose, in a mere bodily blessing, appointed for the recuperation of our physical frame—that is but a secondary object; no, the abstention from mental and manual labours is not its primary use and purpose but is only preparatory to its great and chief design. The high and prime value of it lies in the salvation and sanctification of God's people, who experience growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord by obeying His Law and keeping faithfully His Sabbaths. As a means of grace towards our sanctification, none, under the blessing of God, is more effectual than the Sabbath. Our right observance thereof has the full-

est assurance of that promise, "them that honour Me, I will honour." Our happiness lies in the favour and service of God; that favour is "life" and that service is "perfect freedom." Then let us do all that lies within our power—by precept, example, and encouragement—to maintain the claims of God's own day.

It lies not within the capacity of any mortal to adequately set forth the tremendous value and supreme moment of a Scriptural observance of the Holy Sabbath. Let us briefly call attention to a few features wherein and whereby the Holy Spirit has emphasized the fundamental importance of this Divine institution. It is placed on virtually the frontispiece of Divine revelation, for immediately after the account of creation we are informed that God Himself rested on that day and hallowed it. It was the very first lesson taught the children of Israel in the wilderness, impressed upon them by the Lord's withholding a supply of manna on that day (Exo. 16). It was made the outstanding "sign" between Jehovah and His people (Exo. 31:13). The most fearful judgments were sent upon them for their violation of the Fourth Commandment. The Lord Jesus set His imprimatur upon it in an unmistakable manner (Luke 4:16). Finally, the Spirit Himself placed special stress upon this holy ordinance by communicating the last book of Scripture to John on that day (Rev. 1:10).

To be guilty of desecrating the Holy Sabbath is therefore no light matter, my reader. The violation of the Fourth Commandment is a sin of the gravest and blackest kind; yet, sad to say, the profanation of the Lord's Day has become one of the most common crimes of our perverse generation; yea, so general is its pollution that few have any conscience on the matter, but placidly take it as a matter of course. The world has turned the Holy Day into a holiday, and even the majority of professing Christians join hands with them therein. No wonder God is displeased with us as a people, and is more and more evidencing His displeasure against us. Britain has disturbed God's rest, and He is now disturbing Britain's rest; and unless we repent of and forsake this sin as a Nation, then we are most certainly treasuring up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath.

Fully assured that the sanctification of the Sabbath is indispensable for the promotion of the manifestative glory of God, the health and prosperity of His people, the salvation of sinners, and the national well-being; firmly convinced that the desecration of this Blessed Day is our greatest and most grievous national sin, on account of which the Lord is visiting us with judgment, which ominously threatens to become far more severe unless we mend our ways—this writer dares not remain silent thereon, but determines to use whatever influence he possesses in pressing the claims of this sacred and grand institution. Then let all who fear the Lord, who dread His displeasure, who desire to see a revival of vital godliness in the churches, and who love their country and wish to save it from being completely paganized, resolve and determine, "as for me and my house," we will "remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

If the Sabbath were of little or no value, there would be some excuse for standing by and leaving it to its assailants. But since it *is* of Divine appointment, since its weighty and venerable claims are as binding on us today as they were upon God's people in Old Testament times, since the Lord is very jealous of its sanctity (honouring the nation which respects it and visiting His indignation upon those who pollute it), since its proper observance is fraught with such spiritual blessing to the churches and moral and temporal good to the country, then we should do no less than evidence an uncompromising firmness, yet reasonable and enlightened zeal, in doing all we can to preserve this imperiled treasure,

and thus secure for future generations a boon won for ourselves by the efforts, sacrifices, and prayers of godly progenitors. Thus did our forefathers, and woe be unto as if we now squander our birthright.

In view of all that has been pointed out above, is it not tragic beyond words to witness not only the general indifference of the vast majority of professing Christians unto the claims of the Holy Sabbath and to the world's awful profanation of it, but also to find that many influential men among the reputedly orthodox sections of Christendom—the “leaders of Christian thought”—should oppose those who are striving for the preservation of this spiritual heritage? These men are seeking to destroy its very foundations by teaching that the Sabbath is only a Jewish institution, and therefore is not binding upon us today. Unspeakably sad is it to find some whom we must regard as brethren in Christ, and who are standing firmly for the Divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, yet in this vital matter making common cause with the Lord's enemies.

John Owen commenced his exercitations on the Day of Sacred Rest by citing, “God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29), adding, “The truth hereof we also find by woeful experience, not only in sundry particular instances, but in the whole course of men in this world, and in all their concerns with respect to God. There is not anything wherein and whereabouts they have not found out many inventions, to the disturbance and perverting of that state of peace and quietness wherein all things were made of God . . . An evident instance we have hereof in the business of a day of sacred rest and the worship of God therein required.”

If this justly renowned Puritan had cause to complain in his time at the many controversies which had been raised about this Divine institution, “agitating among men of all sorts,” and who grieved over their inventions, “to our own disturbance and to the perverting of the right ways of God,” we wonder how he would feel could he take a survey of the present situation. O what “inventions” have professing Christians resorted to in their efforts to set aside the Holy Sabbath, inventions which have greatly influenced the minds of multitudes and enervated them in the practice of that piety which the Lord's Day inculcates and stimulates. How happy Satan must be when he succeeds in moving “Bible teachers” to affirm that the Sabbath is not for us. It is Christ being again wounded in the house of His friends.

Such opposition to the Sabbath is a challenge to all who prize and revere it. The more it be opposed by assailants, the more firmly and unitedly must its lovers rise up in its defense. When some would set aside the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship on the ground of our being under a more spiritual dispensation, we must show the utter fallacy of such an absurd conclusion. Is the secularization of the Sabbath more befitting a spiritual dispensation than the religious observance of it!—more calculated to promote vital godliness, than the dedication of it to holy exercises and attendance on the means of grace? The question answers itself. Then if you, my reader, love the Sabbath because you have found that its devout and dutiful employment has brought you many blessings, it is your bounden duty to spread the knowledge of its claims throughout the land. Pray that it may please the Lord to bless this humble effort to such an end.—A.W.P.

FAMILY WORSHIP.

There are some very important outward ordinances and means of grace which are plainly implied in the Word of God, but for the exercise of which we have few, if any, plain and positive precepts; rather are we left to gather them from the example of holy

men and from various incidental circumstances. An important end is answered by this arrangement: trial is thereby made of the state of our hearts. It serves to make evident whether, because an expressed command cannot be brought requiring its performance, professing Christians will neglect a duty plainly implied. Thus, more of the real state of our minds is discovered, and it is made manifest whether we have or have not an ardent love for God and His service. This holds good both of public and family worship. Nevertheless, it is not at all difficult to prove the obligation of domestic piety.

Consider first the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. It was for his domestic piety that he received blessing from Jehovah Himself. "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). The Patriarch is there commended for instructing his children and servants in the most important of all duties, "the way of the Lord"—the truth about His glorious Person, His high claims upon us, His requirements from us. Note well the words, "He will command them": that is, he would use the authority God had given him as father and head of his house, to enforce the duties of family godliness. Abraham also prayed with, as well as instructed his family: wherever he pitched his tent, there he "built an altar to the Lord" (Gen. 12:7; 13:4). Now, my readers, we may well ask ourselves, are we "Abraham's seed" (Gal. 3:29) if we "do not the works of Abraham" (John 8:39) and neglect the weighty duty of family worship?

The example of other holy men are similar to that of Abraham's. Consider the pious determination of Joshua who declared to Israel, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (24:15). Neither the exalted station which he held, nor the pressing public duties which devolved upon him, were allowed to crowd out his attention to the spiritual well-being of his family. Again—when David brought back the ark of God to Jerusalem with joy and thanksgiving, after discharging his public duties he "returned to bless his household" (2 Sam. 6:20). In addition to these eminent examples we may cite the cases of Job (1:5) and Daniel (6:10). Limiting ourselves to only one in the New Testament, we think of the history of Timothy, who was reared in a godly home. Paul called to remembrance the "unfeigned faith" which was in him, and added, "which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice." Is there any wonder, then, that the Apostle could say, "*from a child* thou hast known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15).

On the other hand, we may observe what fearful threatenings are pronounced against those who disregard this duty. We wonder how many of our readers have seriously pondered those awe-inspiring words, "Pour out Thy fury upon the heathen that know Thee not, and upon the families that call not on Thy name" (Jer. 10:25). How unspeakably solemn to find that *prayerless families* are here coupled with the heathen that know not the Lord. Yet need that surprise us? Why, there are many heathen families who unite together in worshipping their false gods. And do not *they* put thousands of professing Christians to shame? Observe, too, that Jeremiah 10:25 recorded a fearful imprecation upon both classes alike: "Pour out Thy fury upon." How loudly should those words speak to us!

It is not enough that we pray as private *individuals* in our closets; we are required to honour God in our *families* as well. At least twice each day, in the morning and the evening, the whole household should be gathered together to bow before the Lord—parents and children, master and servant—to confess their sins, to give thanks for God's mercies, to seek His help and blessing. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with this duty: all

other domestic arrangements are to bend to it. The head of the house is the one to lead the devotions, but if he be absent, or seriously ill, or an unbeliever, then the wife should take his place. Under no circumstances should family worship ever be omitted. If we would enjoy the blessing of God upon our family, then let its members gather together daily for praise and prayer. "Them that honour Me, I will honour" is His promise.

An old writer well said, "A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of Heaven." All our domestic comforts and temporal mercies issue from the loving kindness of the Lord, and the least we can do in return is to gratefully acknowledge, together, His goodness to us as a family. Excuses against the discharge of this sacred duty are idle and worthless. Of what avail will it be when we render an account to God for the stewardship of our families, to say that we had no time available, working hard from morn till eve? The more pressing be our temporal duties, the greater our need of seeking spiritual succour. Nor may any Christian plead that he is not qualified for such work: gifts and talents are developed by use and not by neglect.

Family worship should be conducted reverently, earnestly, and simply. It is then that the little ones will receive their first impressions and form their initial conceptions of the Lord God. Great care needs to be taken lest a false idea be given them of the Divine Character, and for this the balance must be preserved between dwelling upon His transcendency and imminence, His holiness and His mercy, His might and His tenderness, His justice and His grace. Worship should begin with a few words of prayer invoking God's presence and blessing. A short passage from His Word should follow, with brief comments thereon. Two or three verses of a Psalm may be sung. Close with a prayer of committal into the hands of God. Though we may not be able to pray eloquently, we should earnestly. Prevailing prayers are usually brief ones. Beware of wearying the young ones.

The advantages and blessings of family worship are incalculable. First, family worship will prevent much sin. It awes the soul, conveys a sense of God's majesty and authority, sets solemn truths before the mind, brings down benefits from God on the home. Personal piety in the home is a most influential means, under God, of conveying piety to the little ones. Children are largely creatures of imitation, loving to copy what they see in others. "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psa. 78:5-7). How much of the dreadful moral and spiritual conditions of the masses today may be traced back to the neglect of their fathers in this duty? How can those who neglect the worship of God in their families look for peace and comfort therein? Daily prayer in the home is a blessed means of grace for allaying those unhappy passions to which our common nature is subject.

Finally, family prayer gains for us the presence and blessing of the Lord. There is a promise of His presence which is peculiarly applicable to this duty: see Matthew 18:19, 20. Many have found in family worship that help and communion with God which they sought for with less effect in private prayer.—A.W.P.