

**Volume 21—Studies in the Scriptures—January, 1942**  
**GOOD CHEER FOR THE WHOLE YEAR.**

“The eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deut. 11:12). The historical reference is to the land of Canaan, in which a contrast is pointed between it and Egypt, where the Israelites had sojourned in bondage and misery. The contrast is a most striking and instructive one. Egypt was not watered as other countries: Zechariah 14:18 says that, comparatively, it has “no rain.” Being dependent upon the overflowing of the Nile at a certain season of the year, the waters were, at great cost and labour, stored up in reservoirs and afterwards eked out by degrees for the irrigating of the crops. This entailed much hard work in the making of canals and trenches to carry the waters from the reservoirs to the fields, and in tending the dykes and ditches, working in mud up to the knees. Two verses before our text intimates a man had to bestow as much pains on the watering of his crops as one does on “a garden of herbs.” But Israel in Canaan were spared such tasks, for the early and latter rains which God sent upon it were so abundant that His people were exempted from such toil: the fruitfulness of their heritage being a special blessing of Divine Providence, “a land which the Lord thy God careth for.”

Now Egypt is a *figure* of this world and its inhabitants of the unregenerate. Living “without God” the natural man is his own provider, looking entirely to himself for the supply of his needs. Consequently his cares are many: existence for him is a constant round of anxiety, fretfulness and disappointment. But different far is the lot of the Christian: he is the conscious object of God’s loving solicitude, and though he has to labour for his daily bread and endure the same trials and sorrows as the ungodly, yet it is his happy privilege to cast all his care on Another, knowing that He cares for him and makes all things work together for his ultimate good. Though still on earth, his citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20); though left in a hostile world, he is not left alone; though he is required to make a diligent use of all appointed means, he knows that his bread and water are “sure” (Isa. 33:16). Canaan and not Egypt is the type of his present portion: the eyes of the Lord are always upon him, from the beginning of the year even unto the end thereof.

First, our text speaks of *the Lords’ pleasure in His redeemed*. This is an aspect of the Truth, one of the facets of the Gospel gem, which we do not sufficiently dwell upon. Just as we love to look at and constantly eye an object we prize highly, so the Lord God beholds His people with infinite delight. No doubt it is difficult for us to grasp this wonderful fact, yet it is a truth plainly revealed in the Scriptures: “For the LORD taketh pleasure in His people” (Psa. 149:4), “I will rejoice over thee to do thee good” (Jer. 32:41), He declares. What a remarkable word is that, “the LORD’S portion is His people” (Deut. 32:9). We are often reminded that the Lord Himself is the “Portion” of His saints (Lam. 3:24), but how rarely we hear of “*His inheritance in the saints*” (Eph. 1:18)! He set His heart upon them from everlasting and therefore does He contemplate them as His precious “jewels” (Mal. 3:17). He so loved them as to give His dear Son to and for them, and therefore He ever eyes them with complacency and delight.

Second, our text tells of *the Lord’s presence with His People*. One day ere long they shall “behold the King in His beauty,” see Him “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12), but that will not be till we are taken into His immediate presence. But the Lord beholds us now, not from afar, but by immediate contact. No far-away God is ours, but one who is “with us

always even unto the end.” The “eyes of the Lord” being “upon” us is a figure of speech signifying not only His delight in us but also His nearness to us, as we read elsewhere of “the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting *arms*” (Deut. 33:27), “under His *wings* shalt thou trust” (Psa. 91:4). When the Lord said unto Moses, “I will send an angel before thee,” in effect Moses answered that will not suffice: “if *Thy presence* go not with me, carry us not up hence” (Exo. 33:2, 15). See here the goodness of our God: He will not entrust His people to any delegates or subordinates—“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

Third, our text announces *the power of God toward His people*. “The eyes of the Lord are *always* upon it” (upon us), and as though that is not sufficiently explicit for such dull understandings as ours, it is added, “from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” How that brings out His power: none but God could perform such a wonder! There is never a single day or even *moment* when the Lord our God turns His eyes and heart away from His people in general, but they are constantly fixed upon every one of them individually, though many thousands of miles separate some of them. It brings out, too, His unwearied power: “Behold! He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4). O Christian reader, seek to cherish this thought in your heart throughout this present year: not only will there never be a day nor hour when our God shall forget us, but not a moment when the eyes of His love and favour will be removed from us. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chron. 16:9).

Fourth, our text intimates the *Lord’s Protection of His people*, for the previous clause says, “the land which the Lord thy God *careth* for.” What harm can befall one who is the object of God’s unceasing attention and care? How the fond parent wishes that his or her eyes could ever be upon the little ones: what anxiety often burdens their hearts as they think of them crossing dangerous roads on their way to school, and later as they leave home and go out into the world! Their prayers follow them, but their eyes cannot be “upon” them. Not so is it with the Lord: we cannot get beyond the range of *His* vision. “I the LORD do keep it: I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will *keep* it night and day” (Isa. 27:3). If His eyes are upon me, His hand is also engaged to defend and guard me, and if *He* is for me it matters not who is against me.

Fifth, our text gives assurance of *the Lord’s providing for His people*. This also appears from the preceding clause: “a land which the LORD thy God *careth* for,” which refers particularly to the bountiful supply of rain He sends upon it, making it so fertile and the produce so abundant as to be termed a “land of milk and honey.” So plentiful also is the spiritual provision which Jehovah makes for His people. The same grand truth is also inculcated in the words “The LORD *thy* God.” It is not an absolute God whose eyes are upon us, but one who is in covenant relationship with us. He who protects me is my Shepherd: He who cares for me is not only my God by way of power, but my Father by way of spiritual ties. He is the God of His people by nearest and dearest relationship, which ensures that no good thing will He withhold from them. This was what gave the Apostle such confidence unto the Philippians: “but my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (4:19).

“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous” (Psa. 34:15). Here, Christian reader, is (to borrow an expression from Spurgeon) good cheer for the New Year. We know not what 1942 holds for us, but those who by grace are trusting in the atoning blood of Christ

may enter it with the assurance that the friendly gaze of the Lord God is upon them. It is their privilege to enter each day rejoicing in the blessed fact that not for a single second will the Lord their God remove His eyes from them, cease to care for them, or fail to minister to them. Seek to frequently remind yourself that the Lord has pleasure in His people, that His presence is with and His power engaged on behalf of them, that they are assured of His protection and provision for their every need. Then should they not be of good cheer?! Should they not be delivered from worrying care? Should they not go forward in holy confidence and joy? Trials and tests are certain, and so also is their blessed issue. In the darkest hour, remember my brother, my sister, the eyes of the Lord your God are upon you: the eyes of His love, of His favour, of His compassion.

“The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon” you. What should be our response? The perfect example which our Saviour has left us supplies the answer: “I have set the LORD always before Me” (Psa. 16:18). Yes, our eyes ought ever to be upon Him, and for these reasons. First, we shall only apprehend and appreciate God’s sight of us as we obtain a sight of Him. One who is comparatively unknown to us cannot be confidently reposed upon. We must “acquaint” ourselves with Him if peace is to possess our hearts (Job 22:21); we must eye Him by faith if His mercies are to be spiritually enjoyed. Second, if God looks upon us, much more ought we to look upon Him. When He looks at us as we are in ourselves, He sees nothing but sinfulness and unworthiness; but when we look on Him—what a glorious Object do we behold! Third, the more we are occupied with the Lord our God, the more shall we be weaned from this perishing world, the more shall we be delivered from Satan’s snares, and the better shall we be equipped for the fight of faith (Psa. 34:5). Fourth, the more our hearts are engaged with beholding our covenant God, the greater and grander foretastes shall we obtain of the bliss awaiting us. The glory of Heaven consists in a beholding of God! God looking upon us, we looking upon Him: that is communion. O let us seek to be conscious each day of this year that the eyes of the Lord our God are upon us, and earnestly desire that our hearts may be fixed upon Him.— A.W.P.

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

#### 20. *Dissuasives from Judging others: Matthew 7:2-4.*

Two articles have already been devoted to the opening verse of Matthew 7. Following our usual custom we first dealt with it in a topical manner. There is now so much confusion and misunderstanding of what is meant by that prohibition "judge not" that we felt it was necessary to show at length what is *not* there forbidden. We then pointed out what is reprehended, seeking to set before the reader the fact that God does not forbid us making use of the critical faculty with which He has endowed us. But rather we are required to exert it and form an estimate of whatever we meet with in the path of duty—otherwise, how else shall we escape being deceived by false appearances and imposed upon by every impostor we meet? On the other hand, there *are* many forms of unlawfully judging others, against which we must be much on our guard, the principal of which we sought to describe. Second, we endeavoured to explain the first reason by which Christ enforced this prohibition—"that ye be not judged." This is a far more solemn dissuasive than is commonly believed: referring not so much to the treatment we shall receive from our fellows, but of *the Divine* disapproval at the judgment-seat of Christ.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again" (v. 2). These words contain an amplification of the dissuasive employed by our Lord against unlawful judging at the close of the preceding verse. They warn us that there is One above whose eye is ever upon us and His ear open to every word we utter. If that solemn fact were more seriously laid to heart by us, it would act as a powerful restraint upon us. If we add to that weighty consideration the yet more awe-inspiring truth that we shall yet have to render an account unto God and that His dealings with us in that Day will be regulated by how we have dealt with our fellows, we may well take heed to our ways. "Your Judging others shall afford materials for your being judged, and the measure we have dealt out to others shall be employed, in part, as the ground of determining what measure shall be awarded us. It is just as if our Lord had said, judging is a serious matter, for it brings after it a fearfully important consequence" (John Brown).

Though the Christian stands in a radically and vitally different relation to God than do the reprobate, yet both the regenerate and the unregenerate are alike the subjects of His righteous government, and he will no more wink at the sins of the one than He will at the sins of the other. True, the believer does not and will not suffer the *penal* consequences of his sins, for those were visited upon his gracious Substitute. True, he will not have to answer for any of those sins he committed in the days of his unregeneracy, for they have all been "blotted out" by the precious blood of the Lamb and removed from before the face of God "as far as the east is from the west." Nor do we believe that those sins committed after he became a Christian and which he has truly repented of and confessed to God, will come up before him at the judgment-seat of Christ, for they are "forgiven" and from their unrighteousness he is "cleansed" (1 John 1:9). Nevertheless, it seems clear to us from Scripture that those sins which the Christian has *not* repented of and confessed and those wrongs against his brethren which are not put right in this life, must be reviewed and put right in the Day to come.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Surely these words of Christ are very far from

conveying the idea that His people may unlawfully judge others without fear of any unpleasant consequences attending such a course of conduct: that they may unjustly, uncharitably and unmercifully pass judgment on their fellows, yea upon their brethren, and then console themselves they will not be called upon to give an account of such reprehensible behaviour in the Day of judgment. The fallacy of such a concept should at once appear in the light of all that is revealed of the Divine character. It is not so much a matter of appealing to specific statements of Holy Writ, as it is of bearing in mind the general Analogy of Faith: the ineffable holiness of God, the uniform dealings of Him who is no respecter of persons, the One whose throne is founded upon justice and judgment. It is the basic and broad principles of the Divine government which enables us to envisage their particular exercise and application to any given case.

In all of God's dealings with His people grace and righteousness are outstandingly manifested, and never one without the other. It is by grace they are saved, yet that very salvation is the proof of Christ's having satisfied every demand of Divine righteousness on their behalf. Though our God be "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10), His grace reigns and is ever exercised toward us "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21) and never at the expense of it. Why then should it be thought strange if *both* the righteousness and the grace of God should be displayed when He deals with His own people at the judgment-seat of Christ? While it is blessedly true that "grace" will be brought to us "at the revelation (second coming) of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13), yet will not the dark background of sin be needed in order that grace may shine forth the more illustriously? If the believer is confronted with his unrepented sins, will he not then perceive as never before that doom which he justly deserves and marvel at the grace which delivers him from such a doom? If his sins be *not* brought up then, what need would there be that "he may find *mercy* of the Lord in *that Day*" (2 Tim. 1:18)!

In view of what has been said above it may be replied, But does not God visit upon His wayward people the governmental consequences of their sins in *this* life? Are they not made to reap here what they have sown? If they are harsh in their judgment of others does not the overruling and righteous hand of God so order things that they meet with similar treatment at the hands of their fellows? And even if that be not always the case, yet does not retribution smite them in their conscience, so that their peace is marred and their joy greatly diminished? Against this we have nothing further to say, except that God in His sovereignty may deal more gently with one than with another offender. But what we would point out is that there is nothing whatever said in this passage (nor so far as we are aware in any other) that the judgment which Christ announces as coming upon the offender is one that is *limited to this* life, and where He has not so qualified it, *we dare not*.

In reply to our last remark it may be asked, What Scriptures have you which warrant the idea that the *sins* of believers are to be dealt with (or as we would prefer to express it "be reviewed and righted") in the Day to come? Answer: in addition to those alluded to at the close of last month, we would cite, "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:1, 2). In this passage the Apostle is urging Timothy to persevere in the work to which he had been called, warning him that the time would come when sound doctrine would be objectionable to the hearers of it, when they should turn away their ears from the Truth unto fables—nevertheless,

says Paul, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions" (vv. 3-5). That pressing injunction was enforced by the solemn consideration brought before him at the beginning of the chapter: the living and the dead should be *judged* at the appearing of his Master. But how could that judgment be a powerful persuasive unto fidelity and diligence unless his ministry was to be thoroughly *reviewed* in that Day? Wherein lay its *solemnity* unless he would have to give a full account of his stewardship?

"So speak ye and so do ye as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12). This is a most weighty and solemn exhortation, one which professing Christians of this heedless generation need to seriously and honestly ponder. The "Law of Liberty" is a Divine appellation of the Moral Law (the Ten Commandments) as is made unmistakably clear by the immediate context. In verse 9 believers are warned that if they had "respect to persons," that is, cherished and exercised a spirit of partiality, esteeming the wealthy members of the church more highly than the poorer ones (see vv. 1-5), they were guilty of sin, being "convinced (brought in guilty) of the Law as transgressors," for the Law requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Those who committed this offense might deem it a trivial one, far less heinous than adultery or murder—so the Apostle reminds his readers that the Law is a unit and its authority uniform, and therefore to break any part of it brings in the transgressor as guilty of breaking it as a whole (vv. 10, 11).

From what had been affirmed in verses 9-11, the Apostle draws a seasonable exhortation, one which would be really startling unto many today if they pondered and believed it—the Lord's people are bid to conduct their lives now in the realization that they are yet to be *judged by the Law*. They should order their speech and actions in the light of the Day to come if they would then survive the test of the Law. So far from the Christian's having nothing to do with the Law, he is yet going to be examined by it, as to how near or how far short his behaviour has come of meeting its requirements. For though believers have been delivered from the Law as a Covenant of Works, yet it is still their Rule of conduct; though they have been freed from its terrors (its curse), they have not been freed from its requirements—obedience. To unbelievers that Law is a Law of *bondage* and *death*, but to those who have by grace been made partakers of the nature of the Law-giver it is one of freedom and life: said David, "I will walk at *liberty*, for I seek Thy *precepts*" (Psa. 119:45).

Though the Law be one of liberty yet it is not one of license: so far from it, the Law will be *the Rule* of the Christian's *judgment* and therefore is he commanded to so order his speech and conduct that he may endure its trial in the Day to come. Solemn indeed is it to know that our speech, as well as our actions, shall come under the judicature of God. Still more solemn is the next verse: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13). Those who have dealt unmercifully with others shall find no mercy with God, but they who have acted leniently and charitably shall then receive fulfillment of that promise, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7)—their having dealt mercifully with their fellows is *not the cause* why God will then extend mercy towards them, but is the *evidence* they will receive it. They who have been merciful will endure the test of the Law, for they shall not only find judgment tempered with mercy but overcome by it, for God will rejoice to deal mercifully with those who imitated Himself.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2). In this amplification of the preceding

sentence it seems to us our Lord declares that the more rigidly or strictly we judge others, the more strictly will God yet judge us. In other words, the more light we had and the more we expected and demanded that the conduct of others should square with our rule or measure up to the standard of our apprehension, then let us know that God will deal with us accordingly. There will be no room for us to plead ignorance, for we shall be judged by the very light we had and insisted that others should walk according to—compare Luke 12:47, 48 for an illustration of this principle. As Matthew Henry's commentary says on James 3:1, "Those who set up themselves for judges and censurers shall receive the greater condemnation. Our judging others will but make our judgment the more strict and severe. Those who are curious to spy into the faults of others and arrogate a power in passing censures upon them, may expect that God will be as extreme in marking what they say and do amiss."

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye?" (vv. 3, 4). These verses contain a second dissuasive from forming unlawful judgments and the passing of unlawful censures upon our brethren. Reduced to its simplest terms the reason may be expressed thus: no one is qualified or fit to censure another while he is himself an even greater offender. One would think this so obvious there was scarcely need to state it, still less to urge it; yet experience proves that all of us are so corrupted by sin, so prone to act the part of a Pharisee that we have real need to be warned thereon and to translate the warning into earnest prayer. Unless we take heed of the corruptness of our nature and are constantly on our guard against indulging depravity breaking forth in this reprehensible and vile form, we shall soon find ourselves guilty of the very species of hypocrisy which our Lord here condemned. Yea, it is much to be feared that if we reviewed the past and diligently examined ourselves, not one of us could truthfully claim to be free from this fault.

The first thing taught by this parabolic utterance of Christ's is that sin exerts a *blinding influence*. Most clearly is this evidenced by the unregenerate, for though blind to their own terrible condition, they are quick to perceive the faults and failings of others. And regeneration does not free the believer from this evil tendency, for sin still indwells him, and just in proportion as he fails to unsparingly judge himself will he be inclined to censure others. The second thing intimated by Christ's figurative language is that there are degrees of sin, as appears from the "mote" and the "beam," just as when He charged the scribes and Pharisees with straining a "gnat" and swallowing a "camel" (Matt. 23:34). Not that we may draw the conclusion that any sins are mere trifles, for there can be no such thing as a little sin against a great God, nevertheless there are degrees of heinousness and guilt in different transgressions, as is clear from Matthew 11:23, 24; John 19:11; Hebrews 10:29. The contrast pointed by Christ is between one who allows some lust to prevail over him and yet presumes to criticize another for some infirmity or minor offense.

The force of our Lord's questions, "Why seest thou the mote?" and "how sayest thou to thy brother, Let me pull it out" have the force of, with what face, with what honesty, can you act thus? Upon what ground do you set up yourself as a scrutinizer and critic of the actions of others? Does such a course of procedure issue from a good conscience? Herein our Lord teaches us that our deeds and words, yea, our very thoughts also, must

be conceived and uttered on a good ground and in a proper manner. In Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2 we are forbidden to speak rashly in the House of Prayer or utter anything which has not been duly weighed. Here our Saviour extends this rule to every thought of our hearts and word of our mouths which concerns our brethren. For by "brother" here we understand a fellow member of the Household of Faith, which is what makes Christ's admonition the more solemn and searching, for it is a far more serious offense to wrong a brother or sister in Christ than a worldling—in wounding the former we are wounding Christ Himself (Acts 9:1, 4).

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye?" The majority of the commentators take the view that "brother" here has merely the force of "neighbour," for they consider it is quite inadmissible to regard as truly regenerate one whom our Lord designates a "hypocrite." Whatever difficulty that may raise we shall deal with it when we come to Matthew 7:5. To us it seems clear that it is two Christians who are in view, from the circumstance that the "eye" mentioned is not altogether blind (which is spiritually the case with the regenerate) but merely contains some foreign substance which needs removing. Another thing suggested by the figure used by our Lord on this occasion is that the "eye" (the understanding or faculty of spiritual discernment) may be quite sound in itself though temporarily damaged or put out of action by the presence of an intruding particle: hence there is a tacit but real warning for us against being too ready to denounce the *inward condition* of a brother simply because of some *outward act*, which may be but the temporary result of neglect in watching and prayer, followed by a temptation from without.

The first thing which Christ here reprehends is what we may term the deliberateness and partiality of such conduct. The offender is pictured as one who is definitely on the lookout for blemishes in his brother, fixing his gaze on such. "Why *beholdest* thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye?" has the force of, How can you justify this wretched practice of so eagerly searching for and so fixedly concentrating upon his infirmities? For a "mote" in the eye of another could only be detected by one who was watching him very closely. It is as though he is determined to overlook all that is *good* in his brother, fixing his unfriendly gaze upon the tiniest fault he can discern in him. This is indeed a deplorable state of soul to get into, one upon which we are required to watch diligently and pray earnestly against. To overlook all that which the Spirit has wrought in another and to be occupied only with that which is of the flesh is displeasing to God, unfair to the brother, and highly injurious to our own good.

Far worse is such a course of conduct when we ourselves are guilty of much greater sins than the one we condemn in our brother, which is the principal thing which Christ is here condemning. The glaring impropriety of such a wretched procedure must at once be apparent to all fair-minded people. What right have I to complain at a tiny mote in another's eye when I suffer a beam to remain in my own? To appear so very solicitous about the welfare of a brother as to be concerned over his minutest failings and anxious to correct his slightest faults, while I completely disregard my own sad and far worse state, is nothing but a species of downright hypocrisy. Thus it was with the scribes and Pharisees who condemned Christ for healing the sick on the Sabbath and censured His disciples for plucking ears of corn on that day to appease their hunger and of eating with "unwashed hands." Yet they themselves were guilty of encouraging men to hold their parents in contempt. But again we must remind ourselves that we, too, are Pharisees by



nature, and so deeply corrupted are our hearts and so prone to this sin of rashly judging others, nothing but Divine grace—definitely and daily sought by us—can preserve us from the committal thereof.—A.W.P.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

### 25. Dejected.

We are now to behold the effects which Elijah's giving way to fear had upon him. The message which had come from Jezebel—that on the morrow she would take revenge upon him for his slaying of her prophets—rendered the Tishbite panic-stricken. The moment God saw fit to leave Elijah to himself, we learn the strongest are weak as water when He withholds His support. The powerful Samson was as impotent as any other man as soon as the Spirit of the Lord departed from him. It matters not what growth has been made in grace, how well experienced we may be in the spiritual life, or how eminent the position we have occupied in the Lord's service—when He withdraws His sustaining hand the madness which is in our hearts by nature at once asserts itself, gains the upper hand, and leads us into a course of folly. Thus it was now with Elijah. Instead of taking the angry queen's threat unto the Lord and begging Him to undertake, he took matters into his own hands and "went for his life" (1 Kings 19:3).

Last month we intimated why it was that the Lord suffered His servant to experience a lapse at this time: in addition to what was there said we believe the Prophet's flight was *a punishment on Israel* for the insincerity and inconstancy of their reformation. "One would have supposed after such a public and sensible manifestation of the glory of God and such a clear decision of the contest pending between him and Baal to the honour of Elijah, the confusion of Baal's prophets and the universal satisfaction of the people after they had seen both fire and water come from Heaven at the prayer of Elijah, and both in mercy to them—the one as a sign of the acceptance of their offering, the other as it refreshed their inheritance—that they should now all as one man have returned to the worship of the God of Israel and taken Elijah for their guide and oracle, that he should henceforth have been their prime-minister of state and his directions laws both to king and kingdom. But it is quite otherwise—he is neglected whom God honoured—no respect is paid to him nor any use made of him. On the contrary in the land of Israel to which he had been and might yet have been a great blessing, he finds it impossible to abide" (Matthew Henry). His departure from Israel—and he never returned—was a *judgment* upon them.

In the Scriptures God's children are exhorted again and again *not to fear*: "Neither fear ye their fear: nor be afraid" (Isa. 8:12). But how are weak and trembling souls to render obedience to this precept? The very next verse tells us: "Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." It is the fear of the Lord in our hearts which delivers from the fear of man: the filial awe of displeasing and dishonouring Him who is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. "Be not afraid of their faces" said God to another of His servants, adding "for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD" (Jer. 1:8). Ah, it is the consciousness of His presence which faith must realize if fear is to be stilled. Christ admonished His disciples for their fear: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26). "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14) is the word which we are required to take to heart.

In connection with Elijah's flight from Jezebel we are told first that he, "came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah" (1 Kings 19:3). There it might be thought a safe asylum would be secured, for he was now outside the territory governed by Ahab, but it was only a case (as the old saying goes) of "jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire." For at that time the kingdom of Judah was ruled by Jehoshaphat and his son had married

“the daughter of Ahab” (2 Kings 8:18) and so closely were the two houses of Jehoshaphat and Ahab united that when the former was asked to join the latter in an expedition against Ramothgilead, Jehoshaphat declared, “I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses” (1 Kings 22:4). Thus Jehoshaphat would have had no compunction in delivering up the one who had fled to his land as soon as he received command from Ahab and Jezebel to that effect. So tarry in Beersheba Elijah dare not, but flees yet farther.

Beersheba lay towards the extreme South of Judea, being situated in the inheritance of Simeon, and it is estimated that Elijah and his companion covered no less than eighty miles in their journey from Jezreel. Next we are told that he “left his servant there.” Here we behold the Prophet’s thoughtfulness and compassion for his lone retainer: anxious to spare him the hardships of the dreary wilderness of Arabia which he now proposed to enter. In this considerate act the Prophet sets an example for masters to follow: they should not require their dependents to encounter unreasonable perils nor perform services above their strength. Moreover, Elijah now wished to be alone with his trouble and not give vent to his feelings of despair in the presence of another. This, too, is worthy of emulation: when fear and unbelief fill his heart and he is on the point of giving expression to his dejection, the Christian should retire from the presence of others lest he infect them with his morbidity and petulance—let him unburden his heart to *the Lord*, and spare the feelings of his brethren.

“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness” (1 Kings 19:4). Here we are given to see another effect of fear and unbelief: it produces perturbation and agitation, so that a spirit of *restlessness* seizes the soul. And how can it be otherwise? Rest of soul is to be found nowhere but in the Lord, by communing with and confiding in Him. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest” (Isa. 57:20)—necessarily so, for they are utter strangers to the rest-Giver—“the way of peace have they not known” (Rom. 3:17). And, my reader, when the Christian is out of fellowship with God, when he takes matters into his own hands, when faith and hope are no longer in exercise, his case is no better than that of the unregenerate, for he has cut himself off from his comforts and is thoroughly miserable. Contentment and delighting in the Lord’s will is no longer his portion: instead, his mind is in a turmoil, he is thoroughly demoralized, and now mainly seeks to find relief in a ceaseless round of diversions and the feverish activities of the flesh. He must be on the move for he is completely discomposed: he wearies himself in vain exercises till his natural strength gives out.

Follow the Prophet with your mind’s eye. Hour after hour he plods along beneath the burning sun, his feet blistered by the scorching sands, alone in the dreary desert. At last fatigue and anguish overcame his sinewy strength and he “came and sat under a juniper tree: and requested for himself that he might die” (1 Kings 19:4). The first thing we would note in this connection is that disheartened and despondent as he was, Elijah made no attempt to lay violent hands on himself. Though now for a season God had withdrawn His comforting presence and in measure withheld His restraining grace, yet He did not and never does wholly deliver one of His own into the power of the Devil. *Wicked* men do not “live out half their days” (Psa. 55:23), for either disease sends them to an untimely grave or Satan moves them to commit suicide—sure mark of one who is *abandoned* by God, for the suicide can never repent, nor is there any forgiveness for the dead. Elijah, then, was not utterly deserted by God.

“And he requested for himself that he might die.” The second thing we would note is the inconsistency of his conduct. The reason why Elijah left Jezreel so hurriedly on hearing of Jezebel’s threat was that he “went for his life” and now he longs that his life might be taken from him! Herein we may perceive still another effect when unbelief and fear possess the heart. Not only do we then act foolishly and wrongly, not only does a spirit of unrest and discontent take possession of us—but we are thrown completely off balance—the soul loses its poise, and consistency of conduct is at an end. The explanation of this is simple: Truth is uniform and harmonious, whereas error is multiform and incongruous; but for the Truth to effectually control us, faith must be in constant exercise—when faith ceases to act we at once become erratic and undependable and, as men speak, we are soon a “bundle of contradictions.” Consistency of character and conduct is dependent upon a steady walking with God.

Probably there are few of God’s servants but who at some time or other are eager to cast off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly when their labours seem to be in vain and they are disposed to look upon themselves as a burden. When Moses exclaimed, “I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me,” he at once added, “and if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand” (Num. 11:14, 15). So, too, Jonah, prayed, “Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live” (4:3). Nor is a longing to be removed from this world of trouble peculiar to the ministers of Christ. Many of the rank and file of His people also are at times moved to say with David, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest” (Psa. 55:6). Short as is our sojourn down here it seems long, too long for some of us, and though we cannot vindicate Elijah’s peevishness and petulance, yet this writer can certainly sympathize with him under the juniper tree, for he has often been there himself.

It should however be pointed out that there is a radical difference between desiring to be delivered from a world of disappointment and sorrow and a longing to be delivered from this body of death in order that we may be present with the Lord. The latter was the case with the Apostle when he said, “having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). A desire to be freed from abject poverty or a bed of languishing is only natural, but a yearning to be delivered from a world of iniquity and a body of death so that we may enjoy unclouded communion with the Beloved is truly spiritual. One of the greatest surprises of our own Christian life has been to find how very few people give evidence of the latter. The majority of professors appear to be so wedded to this scene, so in love with this life, or so fearful of the physical aspect of death, that they cling to life as tenaciously as do non-professors. Surely Heaven cannot be very real to them. True, we ought to submissively wait God’s time, yet that should not preclude or override a desire to “depart, and be with Christ.”

But let us not lose sight of the fact that in his dejection Elijah *turned to God* and said, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4). No matter how cast down we are, how acute our grief, it is ever the privilege of the believer to unburden his heart unto that One who “sticketh closer than a brother,” and pour out our complaint into His sympathetic ear. True, He will not wink at what is wrong, nevertheless He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. True, He will not always grant us our request, for oftentimes we “ask amiss” (James 4:3), yet if He withholds what we desire it is because He has something better for us. Thus it was in the case

of Elijah. The Lord did not take away his life from him at that time: He did not do so later, for he was taken to Heaven without seeing death. Elijah is one of the only two who have entered Heaven without passing through the portals of the grave. Nevertheless, for God's chariot Elijah had to wait God's appointed time.

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." He was tired of the ceaseless opposition which he encountered, weary of the strife. He was disheartened in his labours, which he felt were of no avail. I have striven hard, but it has been in vain; I have toiled all night and caught nothing. It was the language of disappointment and fretfulness: "It is enough"—I am unwilling to fight any longer, I have done and suffered sufficient—let me go hence. We are not sure what he signified by his, "I am not better than my fathers." Possibly he was pleading his weakness and incapacity: I am not stronger than they and no better able to cope with the difficulties they encountered. Perhaps he alluded to the lack of fruit in his ministry: nothing comes of my labours, I am no more successful than they were. It may be he was intimating his disappointment because God had not fulfilled his expectations. He was thoroughly despondent and anxious to quit the arena.

See here once more the consequences which follow upon giving way to fear and unbelief. Poor Elijah was now in the slough of despond, an experience which few if any of the Lord's people escape at sometime or other. He had forsaken the place into which the Lord had brought him, and now was tasting the bitter effects of a course of self-will. All pleasure had gone out of life: the joy of the Lord was no longer his strength. O what a rod do we make for our backs when we deliberately depart from the path of duty. By leaving the paths of righteousness we cut ourselves off from the springs of spiritual refreshment and therefore the "wilderness" is now our dwelling-place. And here we sit down in utter dejection, alone in our wretchedness for there is none to comfort us while we are in such a state. Death is now desired that an end may be put to our misery. If we try to pray, it is but the murmurings of our heart which finds expression: *my* will, and *not* Thine be done being the substance thereof.

And What was the Lord's response? Did He turn with disgust from such a sight and leave His erring servant to reap what he had sown and suffer the full and final deserts of his unbelief? Ah, shall the good Shepherd refuse to take care of one of His strayed sheep, lying helpless by the wayside? Shall the great Physician refuse assistance to one of His patients just when he needs Him most? Blessed be His name, the Lord is "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9) "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him" (Psa. 103:13). Thus it was here: the Lord evidenced His pity for His overwrought and disconsolate servant in a most gracious manner, for the next thing that we read of is that he, "slept under a juniper tree" (1 Kings 19:5). But the force of that is apt to be lost upon us, in this God-dishonouring day, when there are few left who realize that, "*He* giveth His beloved sleep" (Psa. 127:2). It was something better than "Nature taking its course": it was the *Lord* refreshing the weary Prophet.

How often is it now lost sight of that the Lord cares for the bodies of His saints as well as for their souls. This is more or less recognized and owned by believers in the matter of food and clothing, health and strength, but it is widely ignored by many concerning the point we are here treating of. Sleep is as imperative for our physical well-being as is food and drink, and the one is as much the *gift* of our heavenly Father as is the other. We

cannot put ourselves to sleep by any effort of will, as those who suffer with insomnia quickly discover. Nor does exercise and manual labour of itself insure sleep: has not the reader lain down almost exhausted and then found he was "too tired to sleep?" Sleep is a Divine gift, but the nightly recurrence of it blinds us to the fact. Many years ago an officer in our church who was suffering from pneumonia obtained no sleep whatever, day or night, for over a week, and nothing the doctors could do would produce rest, for his cough neutralized all their sleeping draughts.

When it so pleases Him, God withholds sleep, and then we have to say with the Psalmist, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking" (77:4). But that is the exception rather than the rule, and deeply thankful should we be that it is so. Day by day the Lord feeds us, and night by night He "giveth His beloved sleep." Thus in this little detail of Elijah's sleeping under the juniper tree which we are likely to pass over lightly, we should perceive the gracious hand of God ministering in tenderness to the needs of one who is dear unto Him. Yes, "the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," and why? "*for* He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:14). He is mindful of our frailty and tempers His winds accordingly. He is aware when our energies are spent, and graciously renews our strength. It was not God's design that His servant should die of exhaustion in the wilderness after his long, long flight from Jezreel, so He mercifully refreshes his body with sleep. And thus compassionately does He deal with us.

Alas, how little are we affected by the Lord's goodness and grace unto us. The unflinching recurrence of His mercies both temporally and spiritually incline us to take them as a matter of course. So dull of understanding are we, so cold our hearts God-ward, it is to be feared that most of the time we fail to realize whose loving hand it is which is ministering to us. Is not this the very reason why we do not begin to really value our health until it is taken from us, and not until we spend night after night tossing upon a bed of pain do we perceive the worth of regular sleep with which we were formerly favoured? And such vile creatures are we that when illness and insomnia come upon us, instead of improving the same by repenting of our former ingratitude and humbly confessing the same to God, we murmur and complain at the hardness of our present lot and wonder what we have done to deserve such treatment! O let those of us who are still blessed with good health and regular sleep fail not to daily return thanks for such privileges and earnestly seek grace to use the strength from them to the glory of God!—A.W.P.

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

### 9. *Its Opposition.*

In bringing this series to a close it seems desirable that we should devote space to a consideration of the opposition made against this truth, and then finally next month an exposition of the same. This subject of the moral inability of fallen man unto good is one which is peculiarly repugnant to his pride, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that his outcry against it is so loud and prolonged. The exposure of human depravity, the disclosure of the fearful ruin which sin has wrought in our constitution cannot be a pleasant thing to contemplate and still less to acknowledge as a fact. To feelingly own that by nature I am devoid of love for God, yea, that I am full of an inveterate *enmity* against Him, is diametrically opposed to my whole make-up. It is but natural to form a high estimate of ourselves and to entertain exalted views both of our capabilities and good intentions. To be assured by Divine authority that our hearts are incurably wicked, that we love darkness rather than light, that we hate alike the Law and the Gospel, is revolting to our whole being, and every possible effort is put forth by the carnal mind to repudiate such a flesh-withering and humiliating description of human nature. If it cannot be refuted by an appeal to facts, then it must be held up to ridicule.

Such opposition to the Truth should neither surprise nor discourage us, for it has been plainly announced to us: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him" (1 Cor. 2:14). The very fact that they are "foolishness" unto him should lead us to *expect* he will laugh at and hold them up to scorn. Nor must we be alarmed when we find this mocking of the Truth is far from being confined to avowed Infidels and open enemies of God, but that this same antagonism appears in the great majority of religious professors and those who pose as the champions of Christianity. Passing through a seminary and putting on the ministerial garb does not transform unregenerate into regenerate men. When our Lord announced, "the Truth shall make you free," it was the religious leaders in Israel who declared they were never in bondage, and when He affirmed, "Ye are of your father the Devil and the lusts of your father ye will do," they replied, "say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan and hast a demon?" (John 8:32-48).

It is just because the fiercest opposition to this truth comes from those inside Christendom and not from those outside, that we deem it well to face the principal objections. We do so with the object of placing the Lord's little ones upon their guard and to let them see there is no weight in such cavils. We would not waste time in seeking to close the mouths of those whom God Himself will deal with in due time, but we desire to expose their sophistries so that those with spiritual discernment may perceive their faith rests upon a foundation which no belching of unbelief can shake. Every objection which Arminians make against the doctrine of man's spiritual impotency has been overthrown by God's servants in the past, yet each fresh generation of them repeat the arrogance of their forbears as though none had ever made it appear they are not worth the breath which retails them. We have already refuted most of their objections in the course of this series, yet by now assembling them together and showing their pointlessness we may render a service which will not be entirely useless.

1. If fallen man is unable to keep God's Law then he cannot be obligated to keep it, is a common objection brought against this truth. It is said that impotency obviously cancels responsibility. A child of three or four years of age ought not to be whipped because it

does not read and write. A man with no legs should not be sent to prison because he does not walk. Surely a just and holy God does not require sinful creatures to render perfect obedience to a Divine and spiritual law. How is this objection to be met? First, by pointing out that it is not based upon Holy Writ but is merely human reasoning. Scripture affirms again and again that fallen man is spiritually impotent, "without strength," that he "cannot please God," and from that nothing must move us. Scripture nowhere states that spiritual helplessness releases man from God's claims upon him, and therefore no human reasoning to the contrary, however plausible or pleasing, is entitled to any consideration from those who tremble at God's Word. Scripture reveals that God does hold fallen man responsible, to keep His Law, for He gave it to Israel at Sinai and pronounced His curse upon all transgressors of it.

What has been pointed out above should be sufficient for any simple soul who fears the Lord. But lest it be thought that that is all which can be said by way of refutation—lest it be supposed this objection is so forceful that it cannot be met in a more direct rebuttal—we add more. To declare that man cannot be obligated to keep the Law if he is unable to do so demands an inquiry into both the *nature* and the *cause* of his inability. Once that investigation is entered into, the sophistry of the objection will quickly appear. Wherein lies man's inability to keep God's Law? Is it the absence of the requisite faculties or his unwillingness to use aright the faculties with which he is endowed? Were fallen man devoid of reason, conscience, will, there would be some force in this objection. Since he is possessed of all those faculties which constitute a moral being, it is quite insane and invalid. There is no analogy whatever between the sinner's inability to tread the highway of holiness and the inability of a man with no legs to walk.

But more—not only is the worthlessness of this objection made evident when we examine the nature of man's spiritual impotency, but equally does it appear void when we diagnose its cause. *Why* is fallen man unable to keep God's Law? Is it because he is wrought upon by some all-mighty being who prevents him rendering obedience? Were fallen man truly desirous of serving and pleasing God—if he ardently longed to do so but was thwarted because another more powerful than himself hindered him, there would be some force to this objection. But so far is God from placing any obstacle in our way He sets before us every conceivable inducement to comply with His precepts. If it is said that the Devil is more powerful than man, and that he is ever seeking to turn him from the path of rectitude, the answer is that Satan can do nothing without our own consent—all he can do is to tempt unto wrong doing, and it is man's own will which either yields or refuses.

In reply to what has last been pointed out it may be said, But fallen man has no sufficient power of his own with which to successfully resist Satan's evil solicitations. Suppose that is so, then what? Does that oblige us to take sides with the enemies of the Truth and affirm that therefore man is to be excused for his sinful deeds, that he is not obligated to render perfect obedience to the Law merely because he has not the power to cope with his Adversary? Not at all. Once more we must inquire as to the cause. Why is it that man cannot put the Devil to flight? Is it because he was originally vested with less moral strength than his foe possesses? No indeed, for he was made in the image and likeness of God. Man's present inability has been brought about by an act of his own and not by any stinginess or oversight of his Creator's. "Thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hosea 13:9) is



the Divine verdict, and though man is unable to recover what he lost, he has none but himself to blame for his willful and wicked destruction of his original strength.

It is at this very point man twists and wriggles most, seeking to get from under the onus which righteously rests upon him. When Adam offended against the Divine Law he sought to throw the blame upon his wife, and she in turn upon the Devil, while ever since then the great majority have attempted to cast it on God Himself, on the pretext that He is the One who gave them being and sent them into the world in their present handicapped condition. It must then be kept steadily in mind that original ability destroyed by self-determination does not, and cannot, destroy the original obligation any more than weakened moral strength by self-indulgence and the formation of evil habits destroys or diminishes obligation. To say otherwise would be to declare that the result of sin excuses sin itself, which is a manifest absurdity. Man's wrong-doing certainly does not annul God's rights. God is no Egyptian taskmaster requiring men to make bricks without straw: He endowed man with everything requisite for the discharge of his duty, and though man has squandered his substance in riotous living, that does not free him from meeting God's just claims upon him.

The drunkard is certainly less able to obey the law of temperance than the sober man is yet that law has precisely the same claims upon the former as it has upon the latter. In commercial life the loss of ability to pay does not release from obligations; the loss of property does not free man from his indebtedness: a man is as much a debtor to his creditors after his bankruptcy as he was previously. It is a legal maxim that bankruptcy does not invalidate contracts. If it be pointed out that an insolvent debtor cannot be sued in the courts, the answer is, even if human law deems it equitable to free an insolvent debtor, the Law of God does not: "Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing" (Matt. 5:26). And most righteous is that verdict, for the sinner's inability to render unto God His due is a voluntary one—he does not wish to pay because he hates Him. Thus both the nature and the cause of man's inability demonstrate that he is "without excuse."

2. When the inquiry is pressed as to the cause of man's spiritual impotency and when it has been shown that this lies not in the Creator but in his own original rebellion, so far from the objector being silenced he will now demur against his being penalized for what his first parents did, asking, Is it just that I should be sent into this world in a state of spiritual helplessness because of *their* offense? I did not make myself: if I were created with a corrupt nature why should I be held to blame for its inevitable fruits? First, let it be pointed out that it is not essential in order for a fallen creature to be blamable for his evil dispositions and acts that he must first be inherently holy. A person who is depraved, who from his heart hates God and despises His Law is none the less a sinner because he has been depraved from his birth. His having sinned from the beginning and throughout his existence is surely no valid extenuation for his sinning now. Nor is his guilt any the less because his depravity is so deeply rooted in his nature: the stronger his enmity against God the greater its heinousness.

But how can I be condemned for my evil heart when Adam and not myself corrupted human nature? Answer: fallen man is voluntarily an enemy to the infinitely glorious God and nothing can extenuate such vile hostility. The very fact that in the Day of judgment "every mouth will be stopped" (Rom. 3:19) demonstrates there can be no force in this objection. It is the free and self-determined *acting out* of his nature for which the sinner

will be held accountable. The fact that we are born traitors to God cannot cancel our obligation to render Him allegiance—none can escape from the righteous requirements of the Law by a deliberate opposition thereto. That man's nature is the direct consequence of Adam's transgression does not in the slightest degree mitigate his own sins. Is it not a solemn fact that each of us has *approved* Adam's transgression by following his example and joining with him in rebellion against God? That we go on to break the Divine Law demonstrates that we are justly condemned with Adam. If we resent our being corrupted through Adam why not repudiate him and refuse to sin, stand out in opposition to him and be holy?

Still the carnal mind will ask, Since I lost all power to love and serve God before ever I was born, how can I be held accountable to do what I cannot? Wherein is the justice in requiring from me what it is impossible to render? Let us reply by inquiring, Exactly what was it that man lost by the Fall? Answer, It was a *heart that loved God*, and it is the possessing of a heart which has no love for God that is the very essence of human depravity. This it is in which the vileness of fallen man consists: no heart for God. But does a loveless heart for God excuse fallen man? No indeed, for that is the very core of his wickedness and guilt. Men never complain of their lack of power for loving the world. And why are they so thoroughly in love with the world? Is it because the world is more excellent and glorious than God is? Certainly not: it is only because fallen man has a heart which naturally loves the world, but he has no *natural* heart with which to love God. The world suits and delights him but God does not, rather do His very perfections repel him.

Now, my readers, let us put it to ourselves plainly and honestly: can our being devoid of any true love for God free us from our obligation *to* love Him? Can it to the slightest degree lessen our blame for *not* loving Him? Is He not infinitely worthy of our affections, our homage, our allegiance? None would argue in any other connection as does the objector here. If a king rules wisely and well is he not entitled to the honour and allegiance of his subjects? If an employer is merciful and considerate has he not the right to expect his employees shall further his interests and carry out his orders? If I am a kind and dutiful parent, shall I not require the esteem and obedience of my children? Should my servant or child plead, I have no heart to give what is due, would I not justly consider him at fault and deserving of punishment? Or shall we reason so insanely that the worse man becomes, the less he is to blame? "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour and if I be a Master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 1:6).

3. It is objected that if the sinner be so enslaved by sin that he is impotent unto good then we deny his free agency and reduce him to a mere machine. This is more a metaphysical question than a practical one, being largely a matter of terms. There is a real sense in which the natural man is in bondage, nevertheless within certain limits he is a free agent, for he acts according to his own inclinations without compulsion. There is much confusion on this subject. Freedom of will is not a freedom *from action*: inaction in the will is no more possible than is inaction of the understanding. Nor is freedom of the will a freedom from the internal consequences of voluntary action—the formation of a habit is voluntary—but when formed it cannot be eradicated by a volition. Nor is freedom of will a freedom from the restraint and regulation of law: the glorified saints will be completely delivered from sin yet regulated by the Divine will. Nor is freedom of will a

freedom from bias: Christ acted freely, yet being the Holy One, He could not sin. The unregenerate act freely, that is, spontaneously, agreeably to their desires—yet being depraved they can neither will nor do anything which is spiritual.

4. If man is spiritually impotent, then all exhortations unto the performance of spiritual duties are needless and useless. This objection assumes that God would not address His commands to men unless they were able to obey them. This idea is most presumptuous, for therein man pretends to be capable of judging the reasons which regulate the Divine procedure. Has God no right to press His claims because man has wickedly squandered his power to meet them? The Divine commands import not what we *can* do, but what we *should* do—not what we are *able* to do—but what we *ought* to do. The Divine Law is set before us in all the length and breadth of its holy requirements as a means of knowledge, revealing to us God's character, the relation in which we stand to Him and the duty which He justly requires of us. It is also a means of conviction, both of our sin and inability. If men are sinners it is important that they should be made aware of the fact—by setting before them a perfect standard that they may see how far short they come of it. If men are unable to discharge the duties incumbent upon them it is necessary that they should be made sensible of their woeful condition—that they may realize their need of salvation.

5. To teach men they are spiritually impotent is to cut the nerve of a religious endeavour: if I am helpless what is the use of bidding me to strive? Necessity is a sufficient reason to act without further encouragement. A man in the water who is ready to drown will endeavour to save his life even though he cannot swim and some on the banks tell him it is impossible. Again we would press the Divine side. There is a necessity resting upon us whenever there is a command from God—if He requires, it behooves man to use the means and leave the issue with Him. Again, spiritual inability is no excuse for negligence and inertia, because God refuses not strength to perform His bidding if it be duly—humbly, contritely and trustfully—sought. When did He ever deny grace to the sinner who waited upon Him in earnest supplication and in a consistent use of the means for procuring it? Is not His Word full of promises to seeking souls? If a man has hands and food is set before him, would it not be an idle cavil for him to say he could not eat because he is not moved from above?

6. If the sinner is spiritually powerless then it is only mocking him to bid him repent of his sins and believe the Gospel. To call upon the unregenerate to savingly receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour is very far from mocking him. Did the Son of God mock the rich young ruler when He told him to sell all that he had and follow Him and then he should have treasure in Heaven? Certainly not: had the ruler no power to sell his possessions? Was it not rather lack of inclination and for such lack was he not justly blamable? Such a demand served to expose the state of his heart: he loved money more than Christ, earthly things above heavenly. The exhortations, warnings and promises set down in the Word are to be pressed upon the ungodly so as to render them the more inexcusable, so that they may not say in the Day to come that had they been invited to receive such good things they would have embraced them, that had they been admonished for their sins they would have forsaken them. Their own conscience will convict them and they will know a Prophet of God spoke to them.

7. Finally, for space fails us, it is objected that the doctrine of man's spiritual impotency stifles all hope. To tell a man his condition is irremediable, that he can do nothing

whatever to better himself, will drive him to despair. This is precisely what is desired. One principal end which must ever be kept before the preacher is to shatter the self-sufficiency of his hearer. His business is to undermine the spirit of self-righteousness to break down self-satisfaction, to sweep away those refuges of lies in which men shelter, to convince them of the utter futility of seeking to win Heaven by their own endeavours. His business it to bring before them the exalted claims of God's Law and to show how far short we come of it—to expose the wickedness of the human heart, to reveal the ruin which sin has wrought, to bring the sinner face to face with the thrice holy God and to make him realize he is utterly unfit to stand before Him. In a word, his business is to make his hearer conscious that unless a miracle of grace is performed upon him he is lost forever. Not until the sinner feels that he is helpless and hopeless in himself is he prepared to look outside of himself. Despair opens the door of hope! "Thou hast destroyed thyself: but in Me is thine help" (Hosea 13:9).—A.W.P.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

It has long seemed to this writer that Luke 10:30-35 sets before us an exquisite picture of the sovereign grace of God unto those who have no claim upon Him. That grace is portrayed in the actings of Him who “came to seek and to save that which was lost.” First, we have depicted the state of the sinner: ruined, wretched, inert, helpless in himself. Next we are shown the worthlessness of human remedies, their unwillingness to come to the relief of the one fallen. Then we behold the Saviour succouring, fully meeting the needs of the fallen one. It is the blessedness of the Gospel which is here unfolded, the fullness of its provision, the sufficiency of its remedy. Consequently nothing is here said of its requirements—repentance and faith—nothing of man’s responsibility to meet those requirements. Instead, the sinner is viewed as one who is entirely passive, everything being done for him and to him: he is the recipient of unsought compassion, goodness and free grace. He is not even represented as crying out for help, nor does he “co-operate” at any point. His case is desperate: a fit subject for the great Physician, a suitable object for the Lord of Glory to bestow favour upon!

Strange it is that some of the best commentators dissent from such an interpretation as we have outlined above. Thomas Scott sees in the passage nothing more than “a beautiful illustration of the law of loving our neighbour as ourselves, without regard to nation, party, or any distinction.” In his sermon thereon C. H. Spurgeon said, “I do not think that our Divine Lord intended to teach anything about Himself in this parable, except as far as He is Himself the great Exemplar of all goodness. He was answering the question, ‘who is my neighbour?’ and He was not preaching about Himself at all. There has been a great deal of straining of the parable to bring the Lord Jesus and everything about Him into it, but this we dare not imitate. Yet by analogy we may illustrate our Lord’s goodness by it.” We must leave it to the judgment of our readers as to whether or not what follows is a “straining” or forcing into this portion of God’s Word what is not really there.

The context begins at Luke 10:25, where we read of a Jewish lawyer asking Christ, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”—his design being to draw from Him an incriminating reply. Doubtless he had heard that Christ taught salvation by grace through faith apart from the deeds of the Law. Therefore he determined to now demonstrate from His words that He was in open conflict with Moses, whose disciple he professed to be. Having no conception of salvation except by Law-keeping, he framed his question in a legal way: “what shall I *do*”? Yet in his remaining words he betrayed his gross ignorance and blindness, for whoever heard of *inheriting* anything by *doing*? To “inherit” one must be an “heir,” and heirs are *born* such. A man must be born of God, be made a child of God by the supernatural operation of the Spirit, in order to be an “heir” of God (Rom. 8:17).

Having approached the Lord on the ground of creature performances, on the basis of *doing* something, Christ answered him accordingly: “What is written in the Law? how readest thou?” (Luke 10:26). It is most instructive and blessed to note how the Lord met different inquirers for He always dealt with them according to their moral state: it was not so much the question as the *questioner* He dealt with. There is only one way of dealing with those who are self-sufficient and self-righteous and that is to press upon them the righteous demands of the Law. The Law declares plainly enough what is required of man, what he must “do,” namely, obey God, render full obedience to all His commands, or otherwise fall under His condemnation. It is either complete

compliance with the Law's requirements or come under the curse of God: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

The lawyer gave a correct summary of the Law's requirements (Luke 10:27), but was then met with a word from Christ well calculated to shatter his self-confidence: "And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (v. 28). It is not sufficient to *try* and obey God, it is not enough to do our best (though who among us ever really did so!): "do" them is the uncompromising demand of Sinai. Nor will a partial obedience suffice: "For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Ah, my reader, law is inflexible and unmerciful in the very nature of the case. It presents a fixed standard and cannot do otherwise than pronounce guilty all who come short of it. How clear it is, then, that "by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20). The Law should convince us that we are utterly undone, lost—that unless Christ saves us there is no hope for us.

"But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). Observe this verse opens with "but" not "and." The man was not sincere: it was not light he sought, but to ensnare the Saviour. Yet it seems to us the previous statement of Christ's had probed his conscience and made him feel uneasy. None had expressly condemned him, yet he now sought to "justify himself." Christ had drawn the issue and he sought to evade it: lawyer-like he attempts to raise a quibble over a word. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy" (Matt. 5:43). Did not that furnish ground for necessary distinctions? Was an Israelite alone the "neighbour"? was every Israelite such, or was there a third class between the two? And if the classification was so uncertain, might not the duty of loving the neighbour be held in abeyance? With such quibbles will men seek to escape the cutting edge of God's Word.

This brings us to the passage upon which expositors are disagreed—Luke 10:30. It opens with, "And Jesus answering said," from which it is assumed that Christ did no more than continue His conversation with the lawyer, supplying a reply to his last question, an assumption or conclusion which is said to receive confirmation in verse 36, where the Lord asked His tempter, "which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?"—to which the lawyer answered, "he that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." According to our understanding of verses 30-35 the Lord's design was twofold. First, He drew a picture or stated a case which exposed the state of His interrogator: only one with an *unneighbourly heart* would ask such a question! Second, He took advantage of the occasion to use the Law to bring into relief the glory of the Gospel, portraying one who was in desperate need of love's ministrations and showing that by Himself ministering to that need He was the perfect Neighbour, the true "Friend of sinners." Viewing the passage thus, let us now consider—

### I. The State of the Sinner.

With six short lines Christ drew the picture of fallen man: true of the human race in general, true of every man in particular. 1. He "*went down* from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Luke 10:30). In that brief clause there is both a refutation of the flesh-captivating theory (lie) of "evolutionism" and an allusion to the Fall. Man did not begin existence as a beast, to slowly fight his way up-

wards by his own efforts; instead, he was created in the image and likeness of God, but apostatised, and ever since his direction has been *downward*. Man was placed in a paradise of peace and rest, but he left that blissful state of his own accord and contrary to the expressed command of his Maker. The word “Jerusalem” signifies “the foundation of peace” and stands for heavenly and spiritual things, being the City of God, but apostate man has turned his back upon it, and now, “the way of peace” he knows not (Rom. 3:17). But more—he has gone down “to Jericho,” which is the place of destruction and of the curse (Josh. 6:26). Such is the estate into which man, by his revolt against God, has fallen: he has destroyed himself and lies under the curse of the thrice Holy One.

2. “And fell among thieves.” Travelers tell us that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is a steep descent, the latter part of it going through a desert and it is still infested with brigands or highwaymen. In his original state of peace and rest, man was safe and happy, but by deliberately forsaking the same he encountered those who were the remorseless enemies of his soul. The Devil, the world and the flesh are the thieves which rob man of his heritage: they sap his energies, deprive him of the time which should be redeemed for eternity and take away all serious thoughts God-ward. They take from us, but never give; that was how they treated the “prodigal son” in the far country till he was reduced to penury and starvation. Egypt is the outstanding symbol of the world in the Scriptures, and what did it give to Israel? Nothing but the taskmaster and the whip. O my reader, Satan and the world may promise you “a good time,” but they are liars and thieves, waiting to rob you of your soul and your bodily health! Pay no heed to their siren voices, but hearken unto what God says to you.

3. “Which stripped him of his raiment.” How solemnly true to life is this! What did Satan do to our first parents? What did sin do unto Adam and Eve? It stripped them of that brilliant raiment of light with which God had originally covered them (Psa. 104:2 and cf. Gen. 1:27). As the result of their disobedience they stood naked before God with nothing to hide their shame. But man lost something more than his outward adornment by the Fall; through sin he was divested of his internal investiture—he was stripped of the robe of original righteousness in which the soul had hitherto appeared in immaculate purity before God. And thus it is with you, my reader, if you be out of fellowship with Christ—your sins are uncovered to the sight of Heaven—you are naked and exposed to the law, the justice, the wrath of God. Nothing but the atoning blood of Christ can hide your shame from a sin-hating and sin-avenging God. O that you might be brought to realize your wretched plight!

4. “And wounded him.” Sin and Satan have wounded man’s body, which bring it down with disease and pain to the dust from whence it was taken. They have wounded his soul in all its faculties: his understanding with darkness, his will with a vicious choice, his affections with worldly-mindedness, so that he places his love upon the creature instead of the Creator. They have wounded his conscience with guilt, with fear of death and dread of Hell. They have stopped his ears to the voice of the Spirit and closed his eyes to the glory of God. How completely and severely man is wounded appears from that solemn description supplied by the inspired Prophet: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores” (Isa. 1:5, 6). Worst of all sin has inflicted a mortal wound which has deprived man of his spiritual consciousness, for he is insensible, *unaware* of his desperate state.

5. "And departed." When those thieves had taken everything they sought from the traveler and left him sorely wounded, they callously went their way, caring nothing what became of their miserable victim. How heartless and cruel! Yes, though he appears as an angel of light, desiring to make us happy, Satan is a heartless fiend, anxious only that others should share his awful doom. Though sin clothes itself in many specious forms which attract the unwary, yet it is remorselessly cruel, having no concern for the grief it produces. Satan and sin rob us of health and strength, destroy manhood and womanhood, bring them to the place of acutest distress, and then leave them to their fate. Worldlings will pose as happy and friendly companions while a man's money lasts, but when adversity and retribution overtake him, they depart and desert him. Though history faithfully records these facts, each new generation refuses to profit from the warning and rushes headlong to its doom.

6. "Leaving him half dead." Some have stumbled over these words, supposing that if the previous clauses depict the state of the *sinner* then the description falls short at this point. Not so, the terms are minutely accurate: half dead is precisely the condition of man since the Fall. Alive naturally, dead spiritually; alive earthward, dead heavenward; alive unto sin, dead toward God: no desire to please Him, no fear of Him, no love for Him—"She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). Moreover, men are only "half dead" with regard to the wages of sin: even now they are "alienated from the life of God," but in the Day of judgment they shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9)—when they are cast into the Lake of Fire "which is the *second* death" (Rev. 20:14). In these six lines then, we have a true picture in every part of its tale of misery, the faithful and unerring representation of fallen man, such as none but a Divine Artist could have drawn.

## II. The Passersby.

"And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, come and looked on him, and passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31, 32). If careful attention be paid to their setting, and especially to their terms, these verses need occasion no more difficulty than those which precede or those which follow. But if they are regarded cursorily and only a blurred and general view be taken of their contents, then the fault is ours if we err in our understanding of them. If we approach them on the assumption ("presumption," we ought to say) that they supply nothing more than the "drapery" of the parable, then no wonder if they convey no clear conceptions. Are we to regard each parable of our Lord's as designed merely to set forth a single and central truth, much in it being only "embellishment," or as a Divinely-drawn picture, *no line* in it being superfluous and meaningless? Which is the more honouring to God?

This writer has no difficulty or hesitation in answering these questions. In his judgment it is quite clear that the "priest" and the "Levite" symbolize or set forth something definite, something which it is important for us to understand, something which serves to enhance the beauty and blessedness of that which follows. What that something is must be prayerfully inquired after and sought for by duly pondering each particular detail mentioned in connection with the "priest" and the "Levite." First, it is said of the former that "by chance" he came that way. The same thing is intimated in the case of the "Levite" by the word "likewise." Second, of the former it is said that he "saw" the half-dead traveler; of the latter that he "looked" on him. Third, in each



case we are told that he “passed by on the other side,” that is he offered no assistance to the desperately wounded one—he ministered not to his sore needs. Let us seek to ponder these details.

1. “By chance there came down” that way a certain priest. “By chance” means “by accident,” or as the world speaks, “by a mere co-incidence” the priest passed along the road at that time. But does not this very expression present a real difficulty to those who believe that there are no “accidents” in a world which is governed by God—that nothing enters our lives by mere “chance” or without His appointment? Most certainly this was not a “chance” meeting with respect to Him by whose Providence our every act is ordered. Yet the solution is simple: the word “chance” signifies *without design*: he had no conscious intention, no deliberated purpose of encountering the poor sufferer. Therein lies the key which unlocks this section of the narrative: it was never the Divine will that religion as such should recover or save the sinner—whatever the reason why God gave the “priest” and the “Levite,” it most certainly was not for *that*.

2. What was denoted here by the “priest” and the “Levite”? Viewing the whole parable *dispensationally* the one fallen by the way-side would be Adam: the “priest” the patriarchal era, from Adam to Moses, when the firstborn was the priest, having the right to offer up the appointed sacrifices. Then followed the Levitical age, from Moses to Christ. But considered *doctrinally* and practically, the priest and Levite would stand for the moral and ceremonial law of Sinai. Was it then the purpose of Christ to throw contempt upon Law and Religion? Certainly not: His purpose was to teach us what, after nineteen centuries, vast multitudes in Christendom are still ignorant of, namely, that neither the deeds of the law nor religious performances can avail anything for a desperately wounded sinner who is dead toward God. Baptism, confirmation, church-membership, fasting, attendance at the Lord’s Table can neither impart life nor remove the guilt of sin. The most scrupulous observance of ordinances amounts to nothing for one who is under the wrath of God.

3. “He passed by on the other side.” The real force of this is nearly always missed. It was *not* that Christ here portrayed the priests of Israel as a callous and cruel class. No, according to his own inspired textbook the priest and the Levite *could do nothing* else. The “priest” was appointed for the specific purpose of offering sacrifices. But the wounded traveler had none, nor had he any money to purchase one, for he had been robbed! What, then, could the priest do for him? Nothing whatever. Nor was the “Levite” any better equipped: for him to have so much as *touched* a bleeding man would have ceremonially defiled him (Lam. 4:14)! Neither the one nor the other was competent to or qualified for delivering the ruined sinner, nor had God ever appointed them for any such end.—A.W.P.

(To be completed, Lord willing, in the February issue)

