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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Having looked at the promulgation, the uniqueness, the springs, and the perpetuity of the Moral Law, we pass on to say a word upon *the number* of its commandments, ten being indicative of their completeness. This is emphasized in Scripture by their being expressly designated “the Ten Words” (Exo. 34:28 margin), which intimates that they formed by themselves an entire whole made up of the necessary, and no more than the necessary, complement of its parts. It was on account of this symbolic import of the number that the plagues upon Egypt were precisely that many—forming as such a complete round of Divine judgments; and it was for the same reason that the transgressions of the Hebrews in the wilderness were allowed to proceed till the same number had been reached: when they had “sinned these ten times” (Num. 14:22) they had “filled up the measure of their iniquities.” Hence, too, the consecration of the tithes or tenths: the whole increase was represented by ten, and one of these was set apart for the Lord in token of all being derived from Him and held for Him.

Their division. As God never acts without good reason we may be sure He had some particular design in writing the Law upon two tables. This design is evident on the surface, for the very substance of these precepts, which comprehends the sum of righteousness, separates them into two distinct groups, the first respecting our obligations Godwards, and the second our obligations manwards—the former treating of what belongs peculiarly to the worship of God, the latter of the duties of charity in our social relations. Utterly worthless is that righteousness which abstains from acts of violence against our fellows while we withhold from the Majesty of Heaven the glory which is His due. Equally vain is it to pretend to be worshippers of God if we refuse those offices of love which are due unto our neighbours. Abstaining from fornication is more than neutralized if I blasphemously take the Lord’s name in vain, while the most punctilious worship is rejected by Him while I steal or lie.

Nor do the duties of Divine worship fill up the first table because they are, as Calvin terms them, “the head of religion,” but as he rightly adds they are, “the very soul of it, constituting all its life and vigour,” for without the fear of God men preserve no equity and love among themselves. If the principle of piety be lacking, whatever justice, mercy, and temperance men may practice among themselves, it is vain in the sight of Heaven. But if God be accorded His rightful place in our hearts and lives, venerating Him as the Arbiter of right and wrong, this will constrain us to deal equitably with our fellows. Opinion has varied as to how the Ten Words were divided, as to whether the Fifth ended the first table or began the second. Personally we incline decidedly to the former, because parents stand to us in the place of God while we are young, because in Scripture parents are never regarded as “neighbours”—on an equality; and because each of the first Five Commandments contain the phrase “the Lord thy God,” which is not found in any of the remaining Five.

Their spirituality. “The Law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14), not only because it proceeds from a spiritual Legislator, but because it demands something more than the mere obedience of external conduct, namely, the internal obedience of the heart to its uttermost extent. It is only as we perceive the Decalogue extends to thoughts and desires of the heart that we discover how much there is in ourselves in direct opposition to it. God requires Truth “in the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6) and prohibits the smallest deviation from holiness

even in our imaginations. The fact that the Law takes cognizance of our most secret dispositions and intentions, that it demands the holy regulation of our mind, affections and will, and that it requires all our obedience to proceed from love, at once demonstrates its Divine origin. No other law ever professed to govern the *spirit* of man, but He who searches the heart claims nothing less. This high spirituality of the Law was evidenced by Christ when He insisted that an unchaste look was adultery and that malignant anger was a breach of the Sixth Commandment.

Their office. The first use of the Moral Law is to reveal the only righteousness which is acceptable to God, and at the same time discover to us our unrighteousness. Sin has blinded our judgment, filled us with self-love, and wrought in us a false sense of our own sufficiency. But if we seriously compare ourselves with the high and holy demands of God's Law, we are made aware of our groundless insolence, convicted of our pollution and guilt, and become conscious of our lack of strength to do what is required of us. "Thus the Law is like a mirror in which we behold our impotence, our iniquity which proceeds from it, and the consequence of both our obnoxiousness to the curse" (Calvin). Its second use is to restrain the wicked, who though they have no concern for God's glory and no thought of pleasing Him, yet refrain from many outward acts of sin through fear of its terrible penalty. Though this commends them not to God, it is a benefit to the community in which they live. Third, the Law is the believer's rule of life, to direct him, and to keep him dependent upon Divine grace.

Its sanctions. Not only has the Lord brought us under infinite obligations for having redeemed us from sin's slavery, not only has He given His people such a sight and sense of His awe-inspiring majesty as to beget in them a reverence for His sovereignty, but He has been pleased to provide additional inducements for us to yield to His authority, gladly perform His bidding and shrink with abhorrence from what He forbids, by subjoining promises and threatenings. "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments"—thus we are informed that those who perform His bidding shall not labour in vain, as rebels shall not escape with impunity.

Their interpretation. "Thy commandment" said the Psalmist "is exceeding broad" (119:96). So comprehensive is the Moral Law that its authority extends to all the moral actions of our lives. The rest of the Scriptures are but a commentary on the Ten Commandments, either exciting us to obedience by arguments, alluring us by promises, restraining us from transgressions by threatenings, or spurring us to the one and withholding us from the other by examples recorded in the historical portions. Rightly understood, the precepts of the New Testament are but explications, amplifications, and applications of the Ten Commandments. It should be carefully observed that in the things expressly commanded or forbidden there is always implied more than is formally stated. But to be more specific.

First, in each Commandment the chief duty or sin is taken as representative of all the lesser duties or sins, and the overt act is taken as representative of all related affections. Whatever specific sin be named, all the sins of the same kind, with all the causes and provocations thereof are forbidden, for Christ expounded the Sixth Commandment as condemning not only actual murder, but also rash anger in the heart. Second, when any vice is forbidden the contrary virtue is enjoined, and when any virtue is commanded the

contrary vice is condemned: as in the Third God forbids the taking of His name in vain, so by necessary consequence the hallowing of His name is commanded; and as the Eighth forbids stealing, so it requires the contrary duty—earning our living and paying for what we receive (Eph. 4:28).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

17. *The Single Eye*: Matthew 6:22, 23.

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (vv. 22, 23). Though there is substantial agreement among the commentators in their interpretation of these verses, yet we find considerable difference when it comes to their explanation of details, especially so in connection with the repeated mention of the “eye” and exactly what is connoted thereby. We therefore propose to examine carefully the several terms here employed by our Lord, then seek to ascertain the coherence of the passage—its relation to the context; and then look for the practical application unto ourselves.

“The light of the body is the eye,” rendered “the lamp of the body is the eye” both by Bagster Interlinear and the American R.V. We believe this is a more accurate translation, for the Greek word for “light” in this clause is quite different from the one used in “full of light” at the end of the verse, it being the same as that found in Luke 11:35, 36. In describing the eye as the “lamp” of the body, Christ employed a most apt figure, since that organ has no light within itself. The great source of light to the world and of all things therein is the sun, yet such cannot illumine the body without the eye as a medium. The eye is the receptacle of its light, and by means of its rays, which flow into it, gives light to the body. The word for “if therefore thine eye be *single*” occurs again only in Luke 11:34, yet it is found in a slightly different form in, “for our rejoicing is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in *simplicity* and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to youward” (2 Cor. 1:12).

Thus the meaning of our Lord appears to be something like this: the activities of the body are directed according to the light which is received through the eye. When that organ is sound and functioning properly, perceiving objects as they really are, the whole body is illumined, and we are able to discharge our duties and to move with safety and circumspection. But if the eye be blind, or its vision faulty, then we perceive objects confusedly and without distinction, and then we stumble as if in the dark, and can neither perform our tasks or journey properly, being continually liable to lose our way or run into danger. So far all is simple and plain. But what, we may ask, is connoted by the “eye”? And what is here signified by “the whole body”? That these are figures of speech is obvious, but figures of *what*? It is at this point the commentators vary so much in their explanations.

Matthew Henry begins his exposition with, “The eye, that is, the *heart* (so some) if that be single—free and bountiful, so the word is frequently rendered as in Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 8:2-9, 11, 13; James 1:5; and we read of a ‘bountiful eye’ (Prov. 22:9). If the heart be liberally affected and stand inclined to goodness and charity, it will direct the man to Christian actions, the whole conversation will be ‘full of light,’ full of the evidences and instances of true Christianity—that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father (James 1:27); ‘full of light,’ or good works, which are our light shining before man. But if the heart be ‘evil,’ covetous, hard, and envious, grinding and grudging (such a temper of mind is often expressed by an evil eye: Matt. 20:15; Mark 7:22; Prov. 23:6), the body will be ‘full of darkness,’ and the whole conversation will be heathenish

and un-Christian. The instruments of the churl are and always will be 'evil,' but 'the liberal deviseth liberal things' (Isa. 32:5-8)."

Such an explanation agrees well with the context, both with the more remote as well as the immediate. As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs of our December, 1940, article, in this fifth section of His Sermon (which runs from 6:19 to the end of the chapter) Christ's design was to correct the erroneous views of the Jews concerning the character of His kingdom, and to divert the hearts of His hearers from a spirit of covetousness, and this by a variety of cogent reasons. Having warned them that our characters conform to that which we treasure most, He now intimates that discernment in our choice of treasure will be determined by the singleness of our eye or aim. Yet a little consideration of the above interpretation shows it is too narrow for the scope of our passage: the "eye" is here called the light of "the whole body," but clearly a liberal mind is not the regulator of *all* our affections and actions, but only of works of mercy and bounty.

Continuing his remarks, Matthew Henry went on to say, "The eye, that is, *the understanding* (so some): the practical judgment, the conscience, which is to the other faculties of the soul as the eye is to the body, to guide and direct their motions. Now if the eye be 'single,' if it make a true and right judgment, and discern things that differ, especially in the great concern of laying up the treasure so as to choose right in that, it will rightly guide the affections and actions, which will all be 'full of light' of grace and comfort. But if the eye be 'evil,' corrupt, and instead of leading the inferior powers, is led, and bribed, and biased by them, if this be erroneous and misinformed, the heart and life must needs be 'full of darkness,' the whole conversation corrupt. They that will not understand, are said to walk on in darkness (Psa. 82:5). It is sad when the spirit of a man, which should be 'the candle of the Lord,' is an ignis fatuus; when the leaders of the people, the leaders of the faculties, cause them to err, for then they that are led of them are destroyed (Isa. 9:16). An error in the practical judgment is fatal: it is that which calls evil good and good evil (Isa. 5:20), therefore it concerns us to understand things aright, to get our eyes anointed with eye-salve."

This we deem to be more satisfactory, though it is rather lacking in perspicuity, drawing no clear distinction between the "eye" and the eye being "single." We believe the "eye" in this parable of Christ's is to be taken for *the understanding*, for this is the faculty of the soul which more than any other gives direction to the whole man in all his motions. What a man believes is what largely determines how he lives—"as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Such an interpretation differentiates more definitely between what we have in the previous verse as also in the one which follows. In verse 21 the "heart" stands principally (though not exclusively) for the affections, for *they* are what are fixed upon our "treasure." In verse 24 (the *servicing* of God and mammon) it is the *will* which is primarily in view. Thus in verses 21 to 24 we have the affections, the understanding, and the will respectively, which together make up the inner man.

"If the eye be single" or sound in vision. The contrast presented in the next verse is that of the eye being "evil" or "wicked," so that a "single" eye is a good or holy one. And *what* is a good "eye"? Plainly it is a renewed understanding, an anointed eye, a mind illuminated by the Spirit of God, a mind which is dominated and regulated by the Truth. As the body is furnished with light for its activities by means of the eye, so the mind is fitted for its operations only as it is receptive to the influences of the Holy Spirit. A "single" eye has but one object—God, the pleasing and glorifying of Him. This is borne out

by the other occurrence (in a slightly different form) of this word: “For our rejoicing is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. 1:12). The joyful confidence of the Apostle—which sustained him in his labours—consisted of the consciousness of his sincerity, namely, his “simplicity” (the opposite of duplicity) and godly sincerity of spiritual translucence.

“The eye, that is, *the aims and intentions*. By the eye we set our end before us, the mark we aim at, the place we go to, we keep that in view, and direct our motion accordingly. In everything we do in religion there is something or other that we have in our eye: now if our eye be single, if we aim honestly, fix right ends, and move rightly towards them, if we aim purely and only at the glory of God, seek His honour and favour, and direct all entirely to Him, then the eye is single. Paul’s was so when he said, ‘to me to live is Christ’; and if we be right here, ‘the whole body will be full of light’—all the actions will be regular and gracious, pleasing to God and comfortable to ourselves. But if the eye be evil—if, instead of aiming only at the glory of God and our acceptance with Him, we look aside at the applause of men, and while we profess to honour God, contrive to honour ourselves, and seek our own things under colour of seeking the things of Christ, this spoils all—the whole conversation will be perverse and unsteady, and the foundations being thus out of course, there can be nothing but confusion and every evil work in the superstructure” (Matthew Henry).

So much then for the meaning of the principal terms of our passage. Let us next consider *its connection* with the context. This appears to be somewhat as follows: our discernment between things, our estimation of values, our practical judgment of earthly and heavenly objects is very largely determined by the condition of our understanding—whether it be Divinely illumined or still in nature’s darkness. An enlightened understanding, perceiving objects according to their real nature and worth, enables its possessor to form a true judgment, to make a wise choice and to act aright respecting them. But a darkened understanding, conveying a wrong estimate of things, results in an erroneous choice and a disastrous end. In the latter case the “light which is in” a man is unaided human reason, and moved according to *its* dictates men imagine that they are acting wisely when instead they are pursuing a course of egregious folly, and then how great is their darkness!

Above we have intimated the general connection, but there was also a more particular one with special reference to the Jews. In Matthew 6:19-21 Christ had pointed out that true happiness is of a spiritual and not of a carnal nature, and that it is to be found (in perfection) not on earth but in Heaven. A firm conviction of this is indispensable if our thoughts, desires and pursuits are to take that direction in which true blessedness is to be obtained. But the bulk of the Jews were expecting from their Messiah riches of a mundane and worldly nature, and therefore they despised and refused the spiritual joys He made known to them—their “treasure” being earthly (restored Palestine), their hearts were so too. And why was this? Because the light in them was darkness. They had been erroneously taught, and as unregenerate men they could not perceive their error. They must be born again before they could either “enter” or even “see” the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

The false notions of the Jews respecting the Messiah's kingdom corresponded to the carnal desires of their corrupt hearts, and but served to illustrate what is common to fallen human nature, for "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). The Gentile no more than the Jew has any love or longing for spiritual things, nor can either the one or the other perceive the wretchedness of their condition, for the light which is in them is darkness, great darkness. Proof of this is furnished by Christ in the verses we are now considering: in them He may be regarded as replying to a secret objection which the hearts of men were likely to frame against the two commandments which He had just given—if there be such a necessity of laying up treasure in Heaven and of avoiding to lay up treasure on earth, why is it that the best educated, the shrewdest, the great men of this world commonly seek earthly riches far more than heavenly?

This is a question which, in one form or another, often exercises young Christians and stumbles inquirers. If the true riches of the soul are found not in the things of time and sense, why is it that our fellows labour so hard for "that which satisfieth not" (Isa. 55:2)? If the best which this world has to offer us perishes with the using of it, why is it prized so highly by almost one and all? Here is the explanation: because men view things through a vitiated eye, so that the real appears but a phantom, and the shadows are mistaken for the substance. Marvel not at this, says Christ, they lack the single eye, the Divinely enlightened understanding, they are in nature's darkness: they cannot discern between things that differ, they are incapable of judging aright of true treasure, and being ignorant of the heavenly, they seek only the earthly.

In order that we may have a better conception of what a single "eye" consists of, we need to inquire diligently into what *true wisdom* is. Spiritual wisdom is no common gift which every professing Christian possesses, but is a special bestowment of God in Christ peculiar to those who are regenerated, for Christ Himself is made wisdom unto them (1 Cor. 1:30). And this, not only because He is the matter of their wisdom—they being only truly wise when they are brought to know Christ and Him crucified, but because He is the root thereof. In Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), and as believers are vitally united to Him they partake of His virtues, as a branch derives vitality from its stock.

Now this heavenly wisdom has two actions: the first is to *discern aright* between things that differ. Thus Paul prayed for the Philippian: "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment: that you may approve things that are excellent," or as the margin, "try things that differ" (Phil. 1:9, 10): that is, distinguish good from evil, heavenly from earthly. Thereby the children of God distinguish the voice of Christ, the true Shepherd, from the voice of all false shepherds. Thereby they put a difference between the water of baptism and all other waters, and between the Lord's Supper and all other bread. Thereby they discern their election and calling, perceiving more or less in themselves the marks thereof. Thereby they see the hand of God in providence, ever making all things minister to their ultimate good. "He that is spiritual discerneth all things" (1 Cor. 2:15), which the natural man cannot do.

The second action of this true and heavenly wisdom is to *determine* and give sentence of things, what is to be done and what is not to be done, what is good and what is evil in behaviour. But here let it be remembered that the principal work of this wisdom is to determine of true *happiness*, whereto the whole life of man ought to be directed, which happiness is the love and favour of God in Christ. Herein David showed his wisdom to be

far different from that of the godless around him: “there be many that say, who will show us any good?”—that is the world’s vain quest for happiness; “LORD, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us” (Psa. 4:6)—wherein is the believer’s true happiness. So, too, with the Apostle Paul: (Phil. 3:8). The same should be our wisdom, for if a man had all learning and an intellect developed to the highest possible point, yet if he fail rightly to determine of true blessedness his sagacity is folly. Another important part of this heavenly wisdom is the right use of means whereby we arrive at this happiness.

Now the *fruit* of this single eye is to make “the whole body full of light,” that is, to order the entire life aright, guiding it into the paths of righteousness and making it abound in good works. “I (wisdom—see vv. 1, 11) lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment, that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance” (Prov. 8:20, 21). How urgently it behooves us, then, to seek after and endeavour to make sure we have obtained this true wisdom: if the mind endowed thus possesses such powers of discrimination, how necessary it is that we become partakers thereof. In order to this we must be very careful to get the fear of God into our hearts, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa. 111:10). This fear is a reverential awe of the heart toward God, whereby a person is fearful to offend and careful to please Him in all things. And this we obtain if we receive His Word with reverence, apply it to our own souls as we read it, tremble when it searches our conscience, and humbly submit ourselves unto it without repining. David could say, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105), and therefore “Thou through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies” (v. 98). If we would be truly wise we must cease leaning unto our own understanding and be directed by the Word in all things.

Our deep need of diligently seeking after a single eye—an enlightened understanding, a mind endued with true wisdom—appears in the solemn fact that by nature each of us possesses an eye that is *evil*, filling our whole body with darkness. In consequence of the Fall we lost the power to judge aright in spiritual things, so that we mistake evil for good, things which ought to be refused for things which ought to be chosen. The natural man perceives not the presence of God, or he would be restrained from doing things which he is ashamed to do in the sight of his fellows. The natural man perceives not the sufficiency of God, or he would not trust in the creature more than in the Creator. The natural man is blind to the justice of God, or he would not persuade himself that sin as he may, yet he shall escape punishment. So, too, the natural man is blind self-ward: he perceives not his own darkness, his sinfulness, his impotency, his frailty, his true happiness.

Since this evil eye is in each of us by nature we should constantly remind ourselves of our inability to judge rightly either of God or of ourselves, for it is the first step in true knowledge to acknowledge our own blindness. We must be suitably affected for such a realization, judging ourselves unsparingly, bewailing our misery—that we have a mind so corrupt it disorders the whole of our conduct—and seek by grace to mortify the soul. Since this evil eye is common to human nature, we discover therein what explains the mad course followed by the unregenerate, why they are so infatuated by sin and so in love with the world, and why the seriously inclined among them are deceived by error and captivated by false doctrines. Since human reason is now completely eclipsed how profoundly thankful we should be for the light of God’s Word, yet if that light illumine us and we fail to walk accordingly, suppressing its requirements, then doubly great will be our darkness.—A. W. P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

14. *Confronting Ahab.*

“And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17). How the words of our lips betray the state of our hearts! Such language from the king after the sore judgment which God had sent upon his dominion revealed the hardness and impenitency of his heart. Consider the opportunities which had been given him. He was warned by the Prophet of the certain consequences that would follow his continuance in sin. He had seen what the Prophet had announced surely came to pass. It had been demonstrated before his eye that the idols which he and Jezebel worshipped could not avert the calamity nor give the rain which was so urgently needed. There was everything to convince him that “the Lord God of Elijah” was the sovereign Ruler of Heaven and earth, whose decree none can disannul and whose almighty arm no power can withstand.

Such is the sinner who is left to himself. Let Divine restraint be removed from him and the madness which possesses his heart will burst forth like a broken dam. He is determined to have his own way at all costs. No matter how serious and solemn be the times in which his lot is cast, He is unsobered thereby. No matter how gravely his country be imperiled, nor how many of his fellows be maimed and killed, he must continue to take his fill of the pleasures of sin. Though the judgments of God thunder in his ears louder and louder, he deliberately closes them and seeks to forget unpleasantries in a whirl of gaiety. Though the country be at war, fighting for its very existence, “night life,” with its “bottle parties,” goes on unabated. If air raids compel munitions workers to seek refuge in underground shelters, then their eyes (in one shelter at least) are greeted with notices on its walls—“cards and gambling encouraged.” What is this but a strengthening themselves “against the Almighty,” a flinging of themselves “upon the thick bosses of His bucklers” (Job 15:25, 26)?

Yet, while writing the above lines, we are reminded of those searching words, “Who maketh *thee* to differ from another,” (1 Cor. 4:7). There is but one answer: a sovereign God, in the plenitude of His amazing grace. And how the realization of this should humble us into the dust, for by nature and by practice there was no difference between us and them: “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph. 2:2, 3). It was distinguishing mercy which sought us out when we were “without Christ.” It was distinguishing love which quickened us into newness of life when we were “dead in trespasses and sins.” Thus we have no cause for boasting and no ground for self-complacency. Rather must we walk softly and penitently before Him who has saved us from ourselves.

“And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel.” Elijah was the one who above all others stood out against Ahab’s desire for uniting Israel in the worship of Baal: and thus, as he supposed, from effecting a peaceful settlement of the religion of the nation. Elijah was the one who in his view had been responsible for all the distress and suffering which filled the land. There was no discernment of God’s hand in the drought, nor any compunction for his own sinful conduct: instead, he seeks to transfer the onus to another and charges the Prophet with being the

author of the calamities which had befallen the nation. It is always the mark of a proud and unjudged heart for one who is smarting beneath the righteous rod of God to throw the blame upon someone else, just as a sin-blinded nation which is being scourged for its iniquities will attribute their troubles to the blunders of their political rulers.

It is no unusual thing for God's upright ministers to be spoken of as troublers of peoples and nations. Faithful Amos was charged with conspiring against Jeroboam the second that the land was not able to bear all his words (Amos 7:10). The Saviour Himself was accused of "stirring up the people" (Luke 23:5); while it was said of Paul and Silas at Philippi that they did "exceedingly trouble the city" (Acts 16:20), and when at Thessalonica they were spoken of as having "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). There is therefore no higher testimony to their fidelity than for the servants of God to evoke the rancor and hostility of the reprobate. One of the most scathing condemnations that could be pronounced on men is contained in those terrible words of our Lord to His unbelieving brethren: "The world *cannot hate you*; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil" (John 7:7). But who would not rather receive all the charges which the Ahabs can heap upon us rather than incur that sentence from the lips of Christ?

It is the bounden duty of God's servants to warn men of their danger, to point out that the way of rebellion against God leads to certain destruction and to call upon them to throw down the weapons of their revolt and flee from the wrath to come. It is their duty to teach men that they must turn from their idols and serve the living God otherwise they will eternally perish. It is their duty to rebuke wickedness wherever it be found and to declare that the wages of sin is death. This will not make for their popularity, for it will condemn and irritate those who are determined to gratify their worldly and fleshly lusts—it will disturb their false peace and such plain speaking will seriously annoy them. Those who expose hypocrites, resist tyrants, oppose the wicked, are ever viewed by them as troublers. But as Christ declared, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11, 12).

"And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (1 Kings 18:18). Had Elijah been one of those cringing sycophants which are usually found in attendance upon kings, he would have thrown himself at Ahab's feet, suing for mercy, or rendering mean submission. Instead, he was the ambassador of a greater King, even the Lord of Hosts: conscious of this, he preserved the dignity of his office and character by acting as one who represented a superior power. It was because Elijah realized the presence of Him by whom kings reign, who can restrain the wrath of man and make the remainder thereof to praise Him, that the Prophet feared not the face of Israel's apostate monarch. Ah, my reader, did we but realize more of the presence and sufficiency of our God, we should not fear what anyone might do unto us. Unbelief is the cause of our fears. O to be able to say, "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2).

Elijah was not to be intimidated by the wicked aspersion which had just been cast upon him. With undaunted courage, he first denies the foul charge: "I have not troubled Israel." Happy for us if we can truthfully make the same claim: that the chastisements which Zion is now receiving at the hands of a holy God have not been caused in any

measure by *my sins*. Alas, who among us could affirm this? Second, Elijah boldly returns the charge upon the king himself, placing the blame where it truly belonged: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house." See here the fidelity of God's servant as Nathan said to David, so Elijah unto Ahab, "Thou art the man." A true solemn and heavy charge: that Ahab and his father's house were the cause of all the sore evils and sad calamities which had befallen the land. The Divine authority with which he was invested warranted Elijah to thus indict the king himself.

Third, the Prophet proceeded to supply proof of the charge which he had made against Ahab: "In that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and thou hast followed Baalim." So far from the Prophet being the enemy of his country he sought only its good. True, he had prayed for and denounced God's judgment for the wickedness and apostasy of the king and nation, but this was because he desired they should repent of their sins and reform their ways. It was the evil doings of Ahab and his house which had called down the drought and famine. Elijah's intercession had never prevailed against a holy people: "the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). The king and his family were the leaders in rebellion against God, and the people had blindly followed: *here* then was the cause of their distress: *they* were the reckless "troublers" of the nation, the disturbers of its peace, the displeasers of God.

Those who by their sins provoke God's wrath are the real troublers, and not those who warn them of the dangers to which their wickedness exposes them. "Thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." It is quite plain even from the comparatively brief record of Scripture that Omri, the father of Ahab, was one of the worst kings that Israel ever had, and Ahab had followed in the wicked steps of his father. The statutes of those kings were the grossest idolatry. Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had no equal for her hatred of God and His people and her zeal for the worship of debased idols. So powerful and persistent was their evil influence that it prevailed some two hundred years later (Micah 6:16) and drew down the vengeance of Heaven upon the apostate nation.

"In that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord." Therein lies the very essence and heinousness of sin. It is a throwing off of the Divine yoke, a refusing to be in subjection to our Maker and Governor. It is a willful disregard of the Lawgiver and rebellion against His authority. The law of the Lord is very definite and emphatic. Its first statute expressly forbids our having any other God than the true One; and the second prohibits our making of any graven image and bowing down ourselves before it in worship. These were the awful crimes which Ahab had committed, and they are in *substance* those which our own evil generation is guilty of, and that is why the frown of Heaven now lies so heavily upon us. "Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" (Jer. 2:19). "And thou hast followed Baalim": when the true God is departed from, false ones take His place—"Baalim" is in the plural number, for Ahab and his wife worshipped a variety of fictitious deities.

"Now therefore send: gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table" (v. 19). Very remarkable is this: to behold Elijah alone, hated by Ahab, not only charging the king with his crimes, but giving him instructions, telling him what

he must do. Needless to say, his conduct on this occasion did not furnish a precedent or set an example for all God's servants to follow under similar circumstances. The Tishbite was endowed with extraordinary authority from the Lord, as is intimated by that New Testament expression, "the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Exercising that authority Elijah demanded there should be a convening of all Israel at Carmel, and that there should also be summoned the prophets of Baal and Ashtaroth, who were dispersed over the country at large. More strange still was the peremptory language used by the Prophet: he simply issued his orders without offering any reason or explanation as to what was his real object in summoning all the people and prophets together.

In the light of what follows, the Prophet's design is clear: what he was about to do must be done openly and publicly before impartial witnesses. The time had now arrived when things must be brought to a head: Jehovah and Baal come face to face as it were, before the whole nation. The venue selected for the test was a mountain in the tribe of Issachar, which was well situated for the people to gather there from all parts—it was, be it noted, *outside* the land of Samaria. It was on Carmel that an altar had been built and sacrifices offered on it unto the Lord (see v. 31), but the worship of Baal had supplanted even this irregular service of the true God—irregular, for the Law prohibited any altars outside those in the Temple at Jerusalem. There was only one way in which the dreadful drought and its resultant famine could be brought to an end and the blessing of Jehovah restored to the nation, and that was by the sin which had caused the calamity being dealt with in judgment, and for that Ahab must gather all Israel together on Carmel.

"As Elijah designed to put the worship of Jehovah on a firm foundation and to restore the people to their allegiance to the God of Israel, he would have the two religions to be fairly tested and by such a splendid miracle as none could question: and as the whole nation was deeply interested in the issue, it should take place most publicly, and on an elevated spot, on the summit of lofty Carmel, and in the presence of all Israel. He would have them all to be convened on this occasion, that they might witness with their own eyes both the absolute power and sovereignty of Jehovah, whose service they had renounced, and also the entire vanity of those idolatrous systems which had been substituted for it" (John Simpson). Such ever marks the difference between truth and error: the one courts the light, fearing no investigation; whereas error, the author of which is the prince of darkness, hates the light, and thrives most under cover of secrecy.

There is nothing to indicate that the Prophet made known unto Ahab his intention: rather does he appear to have summarily ordered the king to summon together the people and the prophets: all concerned in the terrible sin—leaders and led—must be present. "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." An why did Ahab comply so meekly and promptly with Elijah's demand? The general idea among the commentators is that the king was now desperate and as beggars cannot be choosers he really had no other alternative than to consent. After three and a half years famine the suffering must have been so acute that if the so-sorely needed rain could be obtained in no other way except by being beholden to the prayers of Elijah, then so be it. Personally, we prefer to regard Ahab's acquiescence as a striking, demonstration of the power of God over the hearts of men, yea, even on the king's, so that "He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1).

This is a truth—a grand and basic one—which needs to be strongly emphasized in this day of skepticism and infidelity, when attention is confined to secondary causes and the

Prime-mover is lost to view. Whether it be in the realm of creation or providence, it is the creature rather than the Creator who is regarded. Let our fields and gardens bear good crops and the industry of the farmer and the skill of the gardener is praised; let them yield poorly and the weather or something else is blamed: neither God's smile nor His frown is acknowledged. So, too, in human affairs. How few, how very few acknowledge the hand of *God* in the present conflict of the nations. And let it be affirmed that the Lord is dealing with us in judgment for our sins, and even the majority of professing Christians are angered by such a declaration. But read through the Scriptures and observe how frequently it is there said *the Lord* "stirred" up the spirit of a certain king to do this, "moved" him to do that, or "withheld" him from doing the other.

As this is so rarely recognized and so feebly apprehended today we will cite a number of passages in proof. "I also withheld thee from sinning against Me" (Gen. 20:6). "I will harden his (Pharaoh's) heart, that he shall not let the people go" (Exo. 4:21). "The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies" (Deut. 28:25). "And the Spirit of the LORD begun to move him" (Judges 13:25). "And the LORD stirred up an adversary unto Solomon" (1 Kings 11:14). "And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria" (1 Chron. 5:26). "The LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines" (2 Chron. 21:16). "The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia that he made a proclamation" (Ezra 1:1). "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them" (Isa. 13:17). "I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field" (Ezek. 16:7). "Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses and with chariots" (Ezek. 26:7).

"So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." In the light of the above Scriptures what believing heart will doubt for a moment that it was the Lord who made Ahab willing in the day of His power, willing to obey the one whom he hated above all others! And when God works, He works at *both* ends of the line: He who inclined the wicked king to carry out Elijah's instructions, moved not only the people of Israel but also the prophets of Baal to comply with Ahab's proclamation, for He controls His foes as truly as He does His friends. Possibly the people in general assembled together under the hope of beholding the rain fall at the call of Elijah, while the false prophets probably looked with contempt upon their being required to journey unto Carmel at the demand of Elijah through Ahab.

Because the Divine judgment had been inflicted on account of the apostasy of the nation and especially as a testimony against its idolatry, the nation must be (outwardly and avowedly at least) reclaimed before the judgment could be removed. The lengthy drought had wrought no change, and the consequent famine had not brought the people back to God. So far as we can gather from the inspired narrative, the people were, with few exceptions, as much wedded to their idols as ever; and whatever may have been either the convictions or the practices of the remnant who bowed not their knee to Baal, they were so afraid to publicly express themselves (lest they be put to death) that Elijah was unaware of their very existence. Nevertheless, till the people were brought back unto their allegiance to God, no favour could be expected from Him.

"They must repent and turn themselves from their idols, or nothing could avail to avert God's judgment. Though Noah and Samuel and Job had made intercession, it would not have induced the Lord to withdraw from the conflict. They must forsake their idols and return to Jehovah." Those words were written almost a century ago, yet they are as true

and pertinent now as they were then, for they enunciate an abiding principle. God will not wink at sin or gloss over evil doing. Whether He be dealing in judgment with an individual or with a nation, that which has displeased Him must be rectified before there can be a return of His favour. It is useless to pray for His blessing while we refuse to put away that which has called down His curse. It is vain to talk about exercising faith in God's promises until we have exercised repentance for our sins. Our idols must be destroyed ere God will again accept of our worship.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

6. *Its Problem.*

In their Articles of Faith the hyper-Calvinists declare, "We deny duty-faith and duty-repentance—these terms signifying that it is every man's duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe" (see our Dec. 1940 article). Those who belong to this school of theology insist that it would be just as sensible to visit our cemeteries and call upon the occupants of its graves to come forth as to exhort those who are dead in trespasses and sins to throw down the weapons of their warfare and be reconciled to God. But such reasoning is purile, for there is a vast and vital difference between a spiritually-dead soul and a lifeless body. The soul of Adam became the subject of penal and spiritual death, nevertheless it retained all its natural powers. Adam did not lose all knowledge, or become incapable of volition, nor did the operations of conscience cease within him. He was still a rational being, a moral agent, a responsible creature; though he could no longer think or will, love or hate, in conformity to the Law of Righteousness.

Far otherwise is it with physical dissolution. When the body dies it becomes as inactive, unintelligent and unfeeling as a piece of unorganized matter. A lifeless body has no responsibility, but a spiritually-dead soul is accountable to God. A corpse in the cemetery will not "despise and reject" Christ (Isa. 53:3), will not "resist the Spirit" (Acts 7:51), will not disobey the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:8); but the sinner can and *does* do these very things, and is justly condemned for the same. Are we, then, suggesting that fallen man is not "dead in trespasses and sins"? No indeed, but we do insist that those solemn words be rightly interpreted and that no false conclusions be drawn from them. Because the soul has been deranged by sin, because all its operations are unholy, it is rightly said to be in a state of spiritual death, for it no more fulfils the purpose of its being than does a dead body.

The Fall of man with its resultant spiritual death, did not dissolve our relation to God as the Creator, nor did it exempt us from His authority. But it did forfeit His favour and suspended that communion with Him by which alone could be preserved that moral excellency with which the soul was originally endowed. Instead of attempting to draw analogies between spiritual and physical death and deriving inferences therefrom, we must stick very closely to the Scriptures and regulate all our thoughts thereby. God's Word says, "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, *wherein* in times past ye *walked*" (Eph. 2:1, 2). Thus the spiritual death of the sinner is a state of *active* opposition against God—a state for which he is responsible, the guilt and enormity of which the preacher should ever press upon him. If it be asked, Why speak of a state of active opposition against God as a being *dead* in sins? the answer is, because in Scripture "death" does not mean cessation of being, but a condition of separation and alienation from God (Eph. 4:18).

The solemn and humbling fact that fallen man is quite incapable of anything spiritually good or of turning unto God is clearly revealed and insisted on in His Word (John 6:44; 2 Cor. 3:5, etc.), yet the majority of professing Christians have ever rejected it. But it is important to observe that the grounds and reasons on which it has been opposed by Romanists and Arminians are not *Scriptural ones*. They do not allege that there is any specific statement of Holy Writ which directly contradicts it: they do not affirm that any passage can be produced from the Word which expressly tells us that fallen man *has* the power of will to do anything spiritually good, or is able by his own strength to turn unto

God, or prepare himself so to do. Instead, they are obliged to fall back upon *a process of reasoning*, making inferences and deductions from certain general principles which the Scriptures sanction. That there is a vast difference in point of certainty between these two things will at once be apparent.

The principal objection which is made against the doctrine of fallen man's inability is drawn from the supposed inconsistency between it and the hortatory principle which runs all through Scripture. It is pointed out that commands and exhortations are addressed to the descendants of Adam, that they are manifestly responsible to comply therewith, that they incur guilt by failure to obey. And then the conclusion is drawn that, therefore these commandments would never have been given, that such responsibility could not belong to man, and such guilt could not be incurred, unless they were *able* to will and to do the things commanded. Thus their whole argument rests not upon anything actually stated in Scripture, but upon certain notions respecting the reason why God issued these commands and exhortations, and the ground upon which moral responsibility rests.

In like manner we find the hyper-Calvinists pursuing an identical course in their rejection of the hortatory principle. Though at the opposite pole in doctrine—for they contend for the spiritual impotence of fallen man—yet they make common cause with the Arminians in resorting to *a process of reasoning*. They cannot produce a single passage *from God's Word* which declares that the unregenerate must not be urged to perform spiritual duties. They cannot point to any occasion on which the Saviour Himself warned His Apostles against such a procedure, no, not even when He commissioned them to go forth and preach His Gospel. They cannot discover a word from Paul cautioning either Timothy or Titus to be extremely careful when addressing the unsaved lest they leave their hearers with the impression that their case was far from being a desperate one.

Not only are these hyper-Calvinists unable to produce one verse of Scripture containing such prohibitions or warnings as we have mentioned above, but they are faced with scores of passages both in the Old and the New Testament which show unmistakably that the servants of God in Biblical times followed the very *opposite* course to that advocated by these nineteenth and twentieth century theorists. Neither the Prophets, the Saviour, nor His Apostles shaped their policy by the state of their hearers: they did not accommodate their message according to the spiritual impotency of sinners, but plainly enforced the just requirements of a holy God. How, then, do these men dispose of all those passages which argue directly against them? By what is called (in our Law-courts) a process of "special pleading." To quote again their Articles of Faith. These men say:

"We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the Apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely-different circumstances." Thus do they naively attempt to neutralize and set aside the practice of our Lord and of His Apostles. It is very much like the course followed by the Pharisees, who drew up their own rules and regulations, binding them upon the people, against which Christ preferred the solemn charge of "making the Word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). The "We believe it would be unsafe" of these religious dictators is lighter than chaff when weighed against the authority of Holy Writ. If God's servants today are not to be regulated by the recorded examples of their Master and His Apostles, *where shall they turn for guidance?*

And why do the framers of these Articles of Faith consider it “unsafe” to follow the precedents furnished by the Gospels and the Acts? Their next Article supplies answer: “Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new-creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and, on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption.” Here they come out into the open and show their true colours, as mere reasoners. They object to indiscriminate exhortations because they cannot see the consistency of such a policy with other doctrines. Just as the Arminians reject the truth of fallen man’s moral impotency because they are unable to reconcile it with the hortatory principle, so Antinomians throw overboard human responsibility, because they deem it out of harmony with the spiritual helplessness of the sinner.

Alas, alas, what is man? Why, as God Himself tells us, “Verily, every man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (Psa. 39:5). No wonder, then, that He bids us, “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?” (Isa. 2:22). Yes, “Cease ye from man”—religious man as much as irreligious man: cease from placing any confidence in or dependency upon him, especially in connection with spiritual and Divine matters, for we cannot afford to be misdirected therein. Then what must I do? asks the bewildered reader. Weigh everything you hear or read in the balances of the Sanctuary: test it diligently by Holy Writ: “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21). And what is the servant of Christ to do? Why, execute the commission his Master has given him, declare all the counsel of God (not mangled bits of it), and leave the Lord to harmonize what may seem contradictory to him—just as Abraham proceeded to obediently slay Isaac, even though he was quite incapable of harmonizing God’s command with His promise that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

It will occasion no surprise to most of our readers when we tell them that those ministers who are debarred from calling upon the unsaved to repent and believe the Gospel are also exceedingly slack in exhorting professing Christians. The Divine commandments are almost entirely absent from their ministry. They preach much upon doctrine, much upon experience, but deportment receives the very scantiest notice. It is not too much to say that they seem to be utterly afraid of the very word *duty*. They preach soundly and blessedly upon the obedience which Christ rendered unto God on behalf of His people, but they say next to nothing of that obedience which the Lord requires from those He has redeemed. They give many comforting addresses from God’s promises, but they are woefully remiss in delivering searching messages upon His *precepts*. If anyone thinks this charge is unfair, let him pick up a volume of sermons by any of these men and see if he can find a single sermon on one of the precepts.

As an example of what we have just complained of we will quote at some length from a series of “Meditations on the Preceptive Part of the Word of God” by J. C. Philpot, which appeared in “the Gospel Standard” of 1865. Let it be duly noted that these were not the casual and careless utterances of the pulpit, but the deliberate and studied products of his pen. In his first article upon the Preceptive Part of the Word of God, Mr. Philpot said: “It is a branch of Divine revelation which, without wishing to speak harshly or censoriously, has in our judgment been sadly perverted by many on the one hand, and we must say almost as sadly neglected, if not altogether ignored and passed by, by many on the other . . . It is almost become a tradition in some churches professing the doctrines of

grace to disregard the precepts and pass them by in a kind of general silence” (pp. 63: 319). Sadly true was this declaration, for the charge preferred characterized by far the greater part of *his own ministry*, and applied to the preachers in his own denomination. That Mr. Philpot was fully aware of this sad state of affairs is clear from the following:

“Consider this point, ye ministers, who Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day preach nothing but doctrine, doctrine, doctrine; and ask yourselves whether the same Holy Spirit who revealed the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians did not also reveal the last three? Is not the whole Epistle equally inspired, a part of that Scripture of which we read, ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)? How, then, can you be ‘a man of God perfect’ (that is, complete as a minister) and ‘thoroughly furnished unto all good works,’ if you willfully neglect any part of that Scripture which God has given to be profitable to you, and to others by you? . . . Can it be right, can it be safe, can it be Scriptural, to treat all this fullness and weight of precept with no more attention than an obsolete Act of Parliament?” (pp. 94, 95, 97).

To the same effect, he declared again. “To despise, then, the precept, to call it legal and burdensome, is to despise not man, but God, who hath given unto us His Holy Spirit in the inspired Scriptures for our faith and obedience . . . Nothing more detects hypocrites, purges out loose professors, and fans away that chaff and dust which now so thickly covers our barn floors than an experimental handling of the precept. A dry doctrinal ministry disturbs no consciences. The loosest professors may sit under it, nay, be highly delighted with it, for it gives them a hope, if not a dead confidence, that salvation being wholly of grace they shall be saved whatever be their walk of life. But the experimental handling of the precept cuts down all this and exposes their hypocrisy and deception” (pp. 320, 325).

In developing his theme, Mr. Philpot rightly began by treating of “Its Importance,” and this at considerable length. First, he called attention to “its bulk” or the large place given to precepts in the Word. “The amount of precept in the Epistles, measured only by the test of *quantity* would surprise a person whose attention had not been directed to that point, if he would but carefully examine it. But it is sad to see how little the Scriptures are read amongst us with that intelligent attention, that careful and prayerful studiousness, that earnest desire to understand, believe, and experimentally realize their Divine meaning, which they demand and deserve, and which the Word of God compares to seeking as for silver, and searching as for hid treasure” (Prov. 2:4)—how much less are the Scriptures read today than they were seventy-five years ago!

Next, he pointed out that, “were there no precepts in the New Testament we should be without an *inspired rule of life*, without an authoritative guide for our walk and conduct before the Church and the world . . . But mark what would be the consequence if the preceptive part of the New Testament were taken out of its pages as so much useless matter. It would be like going on board of a ship bound on a long and perilous voyage, and taking out of her just before she sailed, all her charts, her compass, her sextants, her sounding line, her chronometer; in a word, all the instruments of navigation needful for her safely crossing the sea, or even leaving her port” (p. 98). He disposed of the quibble that, “If there were no precepts, the Church would still have the Holy Ghost to guide her” by saying, “If God has mercifully and graciously given us rules and directions whereby

to walk, let us thankfully accept them, not question and cavil how far we could have done without them” (p. 99).

Under his third reason for showing the *importance* of the Precepts, are some weighty remarks from which we select the following. “Without a special revelation of the precepts in the Word of Truth we should not know what was the will of God as regards all spiritual and practical obedience, so, without it as our guide and rule, we *should not be able to live to His glory* . . . Be it, then, observed, and ever borne in mind that, as the glory of God is the end of all our obedience, it must be an obedience according to His own prescribed rule and pattern. In this point lies all the distinction between the obedience of a Christian to the glory of God and the self-imposed obedience of a Pharisee to the glory of self . . . Thus we see that if there were no precepts as our guiding rule, we could not live to the glory of God, or yield to Him an acceptable obedience; and for this simple reason, that we should not know how to do so. We might wish to do so; we might attempt to do so; but we should and must fail” (pp. 111-113).

This section on the importance of the Precepts was ended by pointing out: “On its fulfillment turns *the main test of distinction* between the believer and the unbeliever, between the manifested vessel of mercy and the vessel of wrath fitted to destruction.” At the close of this division he said, “Take one more test from the Lord’s own lips. Read the solemn conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount—that grand code of Christian precepts.” After quoting Matthew 7:24-27 he asks, “What is the Lord’s own test of distinction between the wise man who builds on the rock, and the foolish man who builds on the sand? The rock, of course, is Christ, as the sand is self. But the test, the mark, the evidence, the proof of the two builders and the two buildings is the hearing of Christ’s sayings and *doing* them, or the hearing of Christ’s sayings and *doing them not*. We may twist and wriggle under such a text, and try all manner of explanations to parry off its keen, cutting edge; we may fly to arguments and deductions drawn from the doctrines of grace to shelter ourselves from its heavy stroke, and seek to prove that the Lord was there preaching the Law and not the Gospel, and that as we are saved by Christ’s blood and righteousness, and not by our own obedience or our good works, either before or after calling, all such tests and all such texts are inapplicable to our state as believers. But after all our questionings and caviling, our nice and subtle arguments to quiet conscience and patch up a false peace, there the word of the Lord stands” (p. 115).

Alas that such cogent arguments have had such little weight and that the Precepts have been so sinfully neglected by the denomination which Mr. Philpot did so much to build up.—A.W.P.

THE CALL OF CHRIST.

“Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Having examined at some length the context of these words, that we might the better perceive their connection and the particular characters in which Christ is there portrayed, we turn now to consider the persons here addressed, the ones who were invited to come to the Rest-Giver. On this point there has been some difference among the commentators, some giving a narrower scope to this call of Christ and some a wider. It is to be noted however, that all of the leading men among the earlier expositors united in restricting this particular call to a special class. Let us quote two or three of the principal ones:

“He now kindly invites to Himself those whom He acknowledges to be fit for becoming His disciples. Though He is ready to reveal the Father to all, yet the great part are careless about coming to Him, because they are not affected by a conviction of their necessities. Hypocrites give themselves no concern about Christ because they are intoxicated with their own righteousness, and neither hunger nor thirst after His grace. Those who are devoted to the world set no value on a heavenly life. It would be vain therefore for Christ to invite either of these classes, and therefore He turns to the wretched and afflicted. He speaks of them as ‘labouring’ or being under a ‘burden,’ and does not mean generally those who are oppressed with griefs and vexations, but those who are overwhelmed by their sins, who are filled with alarm at the wrath of God and are ready to sink under so weighty a burden” (John Calvin)

“The character of the persons invited: all that labour and are heavy laden. This is a word in season to him that is weary (Isa. 50:4). Those that complain of the burden of the ceremonial law, which was an intolerable yoke, and was made much more so by the tradition of the elders (Luke 11:46); let them come to Christ and they shall be made easy . . . But it is rather to be understood of the *burden of sin*, both the guilt and the power of it. All those, and those only, are invited to rest in Christ that are sensible of sin as a burden and groan under it, that are not only convicted of the evil of sin—their own sin—but are contrite in soul for it; that are really sick of sin, weary of the service of the world and the flesh, that see their state sad and dangerous by reason of sin, and are in pain and fear about it: as Ephraim (Jer. 31:18-20), the prodigal (Luke 15:17), the publican (Luke 18:13), Peter’s hearers (Acts 2:37), Paul (Acts 9), the jailer (Acts 16:29, 30). This is a necessary preparative for pardon and peace” (Matthew Henry).

“Who are the persons here invited? They are these who ‘labour’ (the Greek expresses toil with weariness) and are ‘heavy laden.’ This must here be limited to *spiritual* concerns, otherwise it will take in all mankind, even the most hardened and obstinate opposers of Christ and the Gospel.” Referring to the self-righteous religionists, this writer went on to say, “You avoid gross sins, you have perhaps a form of godliness. The worst you think that can be said of you is, that you employ all your thoughts and every means that will not bring you under the lash of the law, to heap up money, to join house to house and field to field; or you spend your days in a complete indolence, walking in the way of your own hearts and looking no further: and here you will say you find pleasure, and insist on it, that you are neither weary nor heavy laden . . . then it is plain that you are not the persons whom Christ here invites to partake of His rest” (John Newton).

“The persons invited are not ‘all’ the inhabitants of mankind, but with a restriction: ‘all ye that labour and are heavy laden,’ meaning not those who labour in the service of sin and Satan, are laden with iniquity and insensible of it: those are not weary of sin nor burdened with it, nor do they want or desire any rest for their souls; but such who groan, being burdened with the *guilt of sin* on their consciences and are pressed down with the unsupportable yoke of the Law and the load of their trespasses, and have been labouring till they are weary, in order to obtain peace of conscience and rest for their soul by the observance of these things, but in vain. These are encouraged to come to Him, lay down their burdens at His feet and look to Him, and lay hold by faith on His person, blood and righteousness” (John Gill).

In more recent times the majority of preachers have dealt with our text as though the Lord Jesus was issuing an indefinite invitation, regarding His terms as being sufficiently general and wide in their scope as to include sinners of every grade and type. They supposed that the words, “ye that labour and are heavy laden” refer to the misery and bondage which the Fall has brought upon the whole human race, as its unhappy subjects vainly seek satisfaction in the things of time and sense, endeavouring to find happiness in the pleasures of sin. “The Universal wretchedness of man is depicted on both its sides—the active and the passive forms of it” (Fausset and Brown): that is, they are labouring for contentment by gratifying their lusts, only to add to their miseries by becoming more and more the burdened slaves of sin.

It is quite true that the unregenerate “labour in the very fire” and that they “weary themselves for the very vanity” (Hab. 2:13). It is quite true that they “labour in vain” (Jer. 51:58), and “what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?” (Eccl. 5:16). It is quite true that they “spend money for that which is not bread” and “labour for that which satisfieth not” (Isa. 55:2), for “the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing” (Eccl. 1:8). It is equally true that the unregenerate are heavy laden—“a people laden with iniquity” (Isa. 1:4), yet are they totally insensible of their awful state: “the labour of the foolish wearieth everyone of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the City” (Eccl. 10:15). Moreover, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 57:20, 21): they have neither peace of conscience nor rest of heart. But it is quite another matter to affirm that these are the characters which Christ invited to come unto Him for rest.

Personally we much prefer the view taken by the older writers, for with rare exceptions their expositions are much sounder than those furnished in more recent days. As far back as a century ago a latitudinarian spirit had begun to creep in, and even the most orthodox were often, unconsciously, to some degree affected thereby. The pew was more and more inclined to chafe against what they regarded as the “rigidity” and “narrowness” of their fathers, and those in the pulpit had to tone down those aspects of the Truth which were most repellent to the carnal mind if they were to retain their popularity. Side by side with modern discoveries and inventions, the increased means for travel and the dissemination of news, came in what was termed “a broader outlook” and “a more charitable spirit,” and posing as an angel of light Satan succeeded in Arminianising many places of Truth, and even where this was not accomplished, high Calvinism was whittled down to moderate Calvinism.

That to which we have just alluded is no distorted conception of ours, issuing from an extreme theology, but a solemn fact which no honest student of ecclesiastical history can

deny. Christendom, my reader, has not got into the unspeakably dreadful condition it is now in all of a sudden: rather is its present state the outcome of a steady and long deterioration. The deadly poison of error was introduced here a little and there a little, the quantity being increased as less opposition was made against it. As "missionary" activities absorbed more and more the attention and strength of the Church, the standard of doctrine was lowered, sentiment displaced convictions, fleshly methods were introduced, until in a comparatively short time nine tenths of those sent out to "the foreign field" were rank Arminians, preaching "another Gospel." This reacted upon the homelands and soon the interpretations of Scripture given out by its pulpits were brought into line with the "new spirit" which had captivated Christendom.

While we are far from affirming that everything modern is evil or that everything ancient was excellent, yet there is no doubt whatever in our own mind that by far the greater part of the boasted "progress" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a progress downward and not upward, away from God and not toward Him, into the darkness and not the light. And therefore it behooves us to examine with double care and caution any religious views or ways which deviated from the common teachings and practices of the godly Reformers and Puritans. This writer sincerely trusts that he is not a worshipper of antiquity as such, nor does he desire to call any man "father," yet in view of the awful corruption of the Truth and departure from vital godliness we are compelled to regard with suspicion those "broader" interpretations of God's Word which have become so popular in recent times.

It behooves us now to point out one or two of the reasons we do not believe that Christ was here making a broadcast invitation, issued promiscuously to the light-headed, gay-hearted, pleasure-crazy, masses which have no appetite for the Gospel and no concern for their eternal interests: that this call was not addressed to the godless, careless, giddy and worldly multitudes, but rather unto those who were burdened with a sense of sin and longed for relief of conscience. First because the Lord Jesus had received no commission from Heaven to bestow rest of soul upon all and sundry, but only upon the elect of God. Said He, "For I came down from Heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:38, 39), and that, necessarily, regulated all His ministry.

Second, because the Lord Jesus ever practiced what He preached. Unto His disciples He said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matt. 7:6). Can we, then, conceive of our holy Lord inviting the unconcerned to come unto Him for that which their hearts abhorred? Has He set His ministers such an example? Surely, the word He would have them press upon the pleasure-intoxicated members of our rising generation is, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccl. 11:9).

Third, because the immediate context is entirely out of harmony with the wider interpretation. There we find Christ pronouncing most solemn "woes" upon those who despised and rejected Him (Matt. 11:20-24), drawing consolation from the sovereignty of God and thanking Him because He had hidden from the wise and prudent the things which belonged unto their eternal peace but had revealed them unto babes (vv. 25, 26),

and it is these “babes” He here invites unto Himself; and there we find Him presented as the One commissioned by the Father and as the Revealer of Him. (v. 27).

It must not be concluded from anything said above that the writer does not believe in an unfettered Gospel or that he is opposed to the general offer of Christ to all who hear it. Not so: his marching orders are far too plain for any misunderstanding: his Master has bidden him “preach the Gospel to every creature” so far as Divine providence admits, and the substance of the Gospel message is that Christ died for sinners and stands ready to welcome every sinner who is willing to receive Him on His prescribed terms. Though His mission was the saving of God’s elect (Matt. 1:21), the Lord Jesus announced the design of His incarnation in sufficiently general terms as to warrant any man truly desiring salvation to believe in Him. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). Many are called even though but few be chosen (Matt. 20:16). The way in which we spell out our election is in coming to Christ as lost sinners, trusting in His blood for pardon and acceptance with God.

In his excellent sermon on the words before us, John Newton of blessed memory pointed out that, when David was driven into the wilderness by the rage of Saul that “everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them” (1 Sam. 22:2). But David was despised by those who, like Nabal (1 Sam. 25:10), lived at their ease: they believed not that he should be a king over Israel, and therefore they preferred the favour of Saul whom God had rejected. Thus it was with the Lord Jesus: though a Divine Person, invested with all authority, grace and blessings, and declaring that He would be the King of all who obeyed His voice and that they should be His happy people, yet the majority saw no beauty that they should desire Him, felt no need of Him, and so rejected Him. Only a few, who were consciously wretched and burdened believed His Word and came to Him for rest.

We must now inquire, what did our Lord signify when He bade all the weary and heavy laden “*come unto Me*”? First, it is quite evident that something more than a physical act or local coming to hear Him preach was intended, for these words were first addressed to those who were already in His presence: there were many who attended His ministry and witnessed His Miracles who never came to Him in the sense here intended. The same holds good today: something more than a bare approach through the ordinances—listening to preaching, submitting to baptism, partaking of the Lord’s Supper—is involved in a saving coming to Christ, for such acts as those may be performed without the performer being any gainer thereby. Coming to Christ in the sense He here invited is a going out of the soul after Him, a *desire* for Him, a seeking after Him, a personal embracing of and trusting in Him.

A saving coming to Christ suggests first and negatively a *leaving* of something, for the Divine promise is, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Coming to Christ, then, denotes a turning our backs upon the world and turning our hearts unto Him as our only Hope and Portion. It is the abandoning of every idol and the surrendering of ourselves to His Lordship. It is the repudiation of our own righteousness and every dependency, and the heart going out to Him in loving submission and trustful confidence. It is in entire going out of self with all its resolutions and performances to cast ourselves upon His grace and mercy. It is the will yielding itself up to His authority to be ruled by Him and to follow Him whither-

soever He may lead. In short, it is the whole soul of a guilty and self-condemned sinner turning unto a whole Christ, in the exercise of all our faculties, responding to His claims upon us, prepared to unreservedly trust, unfeignedly love, and devotedly serve Him.

We have said that coming to Christ is the turning of the whole soul unto Him. Perhaps this calls for some amplification, though we trust we shall not confuse the reader by multiplying words and entering into detail. There are three principal faculties in the soul: the understanding, the affections, and the will—and as each of these were operative and were affected by our original departure from God, so they are and must be active in our return to Him in Christ. Of Eve it is recorded, “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof” (Gen. 3:6). First, she “saw that the tree was good for food,” that is, she perceived the fact mentally—it was a conclusion drawn by her understanding. Second, “and that it was pleasant to the eyes”: that was the response and going out of her affections unto it. Third, “and a tree to be desired to make one wise”: there was the moving of her will. “And took of the fruit thereof and did eat”: there was the completed action.

Thus it is in the sinner’s coming to Christ. There is first apprehension by the understanding: the mind is enlightened and brought to see our deep need of Christ and His perfect suitability to meet our needs: the intelligence perceives that He is “good for food,” the Bread of life which God has graciously provided for the nourishment of our souls. Second, there is the moving of the affections: hitherto we discerned no beauty in Christ that we should desire Him, but now He is “pleasant to the eyes” of our souls: it is the heart turning from the love of sin to the love of holiness, from self to the Saviour—it is for this reason that backsliding or spiritual declension is termed a leaving of our “first love” (Rev. 2:4). Third, in coming to Christ there is an exercise of the will, for said He to those who received Him not, “ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John 5:40). This exercise of the will consists of a yielding of ourselves to His authority to be ruled by Him.

None will come to Christ while they remain in ignorance of Him: the understanding must perceive His suitability for sinners before the mind can turn intelligently and consciously unto Him as He is revealed in the Gospel. Neither can the heart come to Christ while it hates Him or is wedded to the things of time and sense: the affections must be drawn out to Him—“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema” (1 Cor. 16:22). Equally evident is it that no man will come to Christ while his will is opposed to Him: it is *the enlightening* of his understanding and the firing of his affections which subdues his enmity and makes the sinner willing in the day of God’s power (Psa. 110:3). It is helpful to observe that these exercises of the three faculties of the soul correspond in character to the threefold office of Christ: the understanding being enlightened by Him as Prophet, the affections being moved by His work as Priest, and the will bowing to His authority as King over Zion.

In the days of His flesh, the Lord Jesus condescended to minister unto the ailments and needs of men’s bodies and not a few came unto Him and were healed: in that we may see an adumbration of Him as the great Physician of souls and what is required from sinners if they are to receive spiritual healing at His hands. Those who sought out Christ in order to obtain bodily relief were persuaded of His mighty power, His gracious willingness, and of their own dire need of healing. But let it be noted that then, as now, this per-

suasion in the Lord's sufficiency and readiness to succour varied in degree in different cases. The centurion spoke with full assurance: "Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed" (Matt. 8:8). The leper expressed himself more dubiously, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean" (Matt. 8:2). Another used still fainter language, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion and help us" (Mark 9:22), yet even there the Redeemer did not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, but graciously wrought a miracle on his behalf.

But let it be carefully observed that in each of the above cases there was a personal and actual application unto Christ, and it was this very application (or approach unto and appeal to Him) which made manifest their faith, even though that faith was as small as a grain of mustard seed. They did not rest content with having heard of His fame, but improved it: they actually sought Him out for themselves, acquainted Him with their case, and implored His compassion. So it must be with those troubled about soul concerns: saving faith is not passive, but operative. Moreover, the faith of those who sought unto Christ for physical relief was one which refused to be deterred by difficulties and discouragements. In vain the multitudes charged the blind man to be quiet (Mark 10:48): knowing that Christ was able to give sight, he cried so much the more. Even when Christ appeared to manifest a great reserve, the woman refused to leave till her request was granted (Matt. 15:27).—A. W. P.

