

Volume 22-Studies in the Scriptures—March, 1943
IN THE POTTER'S HOUSE.

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jer. 18:1-4). This is a passage which has presented difficulty to not a few, or probably it would be more correct to say that (in most cases at least) it has been *made* to present difficulty. Enemies of the Truth have grievously “wrested” these verses and even the interpretations of its friends have not always succeeded in removing the mists which have beclouded the minds of those influenced by error. Because of this and also as we hope to write upon some later portions in this chapter, a comment or two on its opening verses may not prove unacceptable.

Arminians have appealed to this passage in support of their horrible and God-dishonouring tenet that the Creator may be thwarted by the creature, that puny man is able to bring to nought the designs of the Most High. If such a dreadful calamity were possible, then, to be consistent, they should carry such a premise to its logical conclusion, and avow

“The universe He fain would save,
 But longs for what He cannot have!
 We therefore worship, praise and laud,
 A disappointed, helpless God!”

Such a blasphemous caricature of Deity is repugnant and repellent to the last degree unto every renewed heart, yet is it one which finds more or less acceptance today in professedly “Christian” quarters. The natives of dark Africa manufacture idols with their hands but the heathen in Christendom fashion a “God” out of their Satan-blinded minds.

A disappointed and defeated God! What a concept! What a contradiction in terms! How can He be the great Supreme if man is capable of check-mating Him? How can He be the Almighty if lacking in ability to carry out His will? Who would render homage unto One who is thwarted by His creatures? How vastly different is the God of Holy Writ, who has but to speak and it is done—who commands and it stands fast (Psa. 33:9)!

Jehovah is no pasteboard Monarch. No, “our God is in the heavens: He hath done *whatsoever* He hath pleased” (Psa. 115:3). “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in Heaven and in the earth, in the seas and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa. 14:26, 27). “I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel *shall* stand and I will do *all* My pleasure” (Isa. 46:9, 10).

But are there not other passages which speak of God in quite another strain? Suppose such be the case, then what? Why, would these not oblige us to modify our conception of the absoluteness of God's supremacy as predicated in the verses cited above? Certainly not. The Holy Scriptures are not a “nose of wax” (as Papists have wickedly affirmed) which man may twist as he pleases. They are the inspired Word of God, without flaw or contradiction; yet we need wisdom from the Holy Spirit if we are to *interpret* them

aright. “God is Spirit” (John 4:24), incorporeal, and therefore “invisible” (Col. 1:15), “whom no man hath seen nor can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). Must we, forsooth, modify this representation of His ineffable Being because we read of His “eyes” (2 Chron. 16:9), His “hands” (Psa. 95:5) and “feet” (Exo. 24:10)? “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:4): is that negated by the statement, “Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep” (Psa. 78:65), or because He represents Himself as “rising up early” (Jer. 7:13)?

When Scripture affirms that God’s “dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and *none* can stay His hand” (Dan. 4:34,35), are we obliged to place limitations upon such supremacy when we hear Him saying elsewhere, “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof” (Prov. 1:24, 25)? Of course not.

Then how are we to avoid such an expediency? By distinguishing between things that differ: by discriminating between God’s secret will and His revealed will, between His eternal decree and the rule which He has given us to walk by. The latter passage speaks of men scorning the Word of God, which it is their responsibility to obey. The former passage affirms the sovereign supremacy of God over all, whose eternal purpose is accomplished in and by men, not because of their willing compliance but in spite of their enmity and rebellion—as was the case with Pharaoh.

Settle it in your mind once and for all, my reader, that the true and living God is King of kings and Lord of lords, the Almighty, whom neither man nor devil can defeat or successfully resist—for such is the plain and positive teaching of His word. The churches may no longer proclaim such a God. The vast majority of those who still pose as His people may no longer believe in such an One, but that alters not the fact that He *is so*: “Let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). Settle it in your mind likewise that Holy Writ cannot contradict itself, and therefore if the meaning of some passages are not clear to you, humbly look to their Author to enlighten you—for the obscurity is in your mind and not in His Word.

When Christ affirmed, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30), He spake according to His absolute Deity. But when He declared, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), He spake as the God-man Mediator. The perfect accord of the two passages is evident when we perceive the dual relationship of Christ to the Father: as the Son and as God-man. In like manner we must learn to distinguish between God speaking as absolute sovereign and as the Enforcer of human responsibility—as the One who deals with men according to their condition.

Now in the verses at the beginning of this article there is not even an apparent difficulty: men must read into it what is not there before they encounter a stumbling stone. The Lord does *not* affirm therein that He is represented by “the potter” (vv. 5-10 are considered in our next), and if we suppose He *is*, then we shall be rightly confounded. Jeremiah was sent to a “potter’s house” that he might receive instruction from what he saw. While there he witnessed a vessel of clay “marred” in the hand of the potter. Most assuredly that cannot picture man’s fall, for his Creator pronounced him “very good” when he left His hands. Nor can it picture the experience of any since the Fall, for the

hand of God is the place of safety and not of injury. Further, we are told this potter “made it (the marred vessel) again another vessel.” But God never mends what man has marred, but displaces with something altogether *new*: the old covenant was set aside for the New (Heb. 8:8), the old creation for a New (2 Cor. 5:17), the present Heaven and earth by a New (Isa. 65:17). Rather is the “as seemed good to the potter to make it” the particular similitude fastened upon (v. 6).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

25. *The False Prophets: Matthew 7:15-20.*

During the days of His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus furnished full proof that He was the perfect Preacher as well as the model Man. That fact has not received the attention which it deserves, especially among those responsible for training the future occupants of our pulpits. We have perused numerous works on homiletics, but never came across one which attempted to analyze and summarize the methods followed by Christ in His public and private discourses. If the believer finds it necessary and beneficial to ponder the prayers of the Saviour in order that his devotional life may be directed and enriched thereby, surely the minister of the Gospel should feel it both essential and helpful to make a close study of how He approached and addressed both sinners and saints. If he does so he will discover the use Christ made of the Scriptures, the wealth of illustration He drew from the simplest objects of nature, the particular aspects of Truth on which He threw the most emphasis, the variety of motives to which He appealed, the different parts of man's complex constitution to which He addressed Himself, the repetitions He deemed needful, the searching questions He so often asked, the homely comparisons He made, and the sharp contrasts He drew.

Even if the student confines his attention to the Sermon on the Mount he will perceive how wide was the range of this single Address, how numerous were the themes covered, how diverse the characters dealt with, and thus how many-sided is the work of the ministry. First the Lord depicted those upon whom the benediction of God rests, describing them according to their character and conduct. Next He defined the function and purpose of His servants: they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Then He declared His attitude unto the Law and the Prophets and inculcated the basic law of His kingdom (Matt. 5:20). Next He expounded the spirituality of the Law and showed it demands conformity of heart as well as of action, displaying the high and holy standard which God will in no wise lower. This was followed by a warning against hypocrisy, especially in connection with prayer and fasting. Treasures in Heaven were contrasted from those on earth, and the futility of seeking to serve two masters shown. Expostulation was made against covetousness and carking care. The subject of judging others was opened up, spiritual ambition encouraged, and the golden rule enunciated. The ways of death and of life were faithfully drawn.

This brief summary brings us to our present passage, which opens with a solemn warning. It is not sufficient to enforce the Law and expound the Gospel. Nor has the pulpit completed its task by setting before believers their various duties and calling to the discharge thereof. There are enemies to be warned against. Doubtless it is a far more delightful task to expatiate upon the riches of Divine grace and the excellencies and glories of the Redeemer, but there are also other matters which need attention. If the example of Christ and His Apostles is to be followed the saints are to be put on their guard against those who would seduce them, who with "cunning craftiness lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). Salvation is obtained by coming to the knowledge of the Truth (1 Tim. 2:4), and they who are deluded into believing a lie shall be dammed (2 Thess. 2:11, 12). The very fact that eternal destiny is involved by what we believe is sufficient to show the deep seriousness of the issue here raised. He who has the care of souls must spare no pains in sounding the alarm.

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Herein we behold their “cunning craftiness.” They do not appear in their true colours but are cleverly disguised. They pose as true friends of the Lord’s people, when in reality they are their deadliest foes. They proclaim themselves to be genuine Christians, whereas in truth they are the emissaries of Satan. They feign themselves to be the teachers of the Truth, but their aim is to instill falsehoods. They work not outside in the profane world, but among the assemblies of the saints pretending to be deeply taught of God, the champions of orthodoxy, men filled with love earnestly seeking the good of souls. Beware of them, says the great Shepherd of the sheep, for inwardly they are ravening wolves—fierce, merciless, seeking the destruction of the flock. Let that fact alarm you, arouse you to your danger and make you vigilant in guarding against it. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed upon.

And what is the best course to take in order to heed this solemn warning? What is the wisest policy to follow so as to be safeguarded from these murderers of souls? How shall we obtain the needed wisdom that we may be enabled to detect and identify these subtle dissemblers? Vitaly important is it that we should obtain right answers to these questions. First, let us duly note *the place* where this warning occurs in our Lord’s sermon. It is found not at the beginning but near its close. Is there not both instruction and comfort in that? Does it not intimate that if we have really taken to heart Christ’s teaching in the former sections we shall be fortified against the danger He here warns against? Does it not tell us that if we earnestly heed His preceding exhortations—if we diligently seek to cultivate inward holiness and endeavour to walk according to the rules given by our Master—that if *we* ourselves have a personal and experimental knowledge of what it is to be a real disciple of His, then we shall have little difficulty in recognizing the false ones?

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22). That clearly states the principle to which we have alluded above. Our Lord’s language here is parabolic but its meaning is quite clear and simple. The activities of the body are directed according to the light received through the eye, and when that organ is sound and functioning properly—perceiving objects as they really are—the whole body is illuminated and enabled to discharge its duties. We can then move with safety and circumspection. In like manner the faculties of the soul are principally directed by the dictates of the *understanding*, and where that is enlightened by the Holy Spirit and dominated by the Truth we shall be preserved from the snares of Satan and the stumbling-stones of the world. A “single eye” has but one object—God—the pleasing and glorifying of Him. “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.” Thus the “single” eye is a holy one, being contrasted from that which is evil or carnal.

When the “eye” is occupied with Him who is Light, its possessor is able to distinguish between the things which differ and to form a sound and right judgment both of persons and things. Our estimation of values is determined by whether our minds are Divinely illuminated or still in nature’s darkness. Where the soul is regulated by the Truth it will be endowed with a wisdom which enables its possessor to distinguish between good and evil. The understanding then becomes a faculty which discerns between the genuine and the spurious. “Thou through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies” (Psa. 119:98). Habitual submission to the Divine authority brings its own reward in this life—part of which is a spiritual discretion which preserves from impostures.

When the understanding is dominated by the Word the whole soul is "full of light," so that all its faculties are under its beneficent influence: the conscience being informed, the affections turned to their legitimate object, the will moved in the right direction. In God's light we "see light" (Psa. 36:9), perceiving the difference between good and evil, the things to be sought and those to be avoided.

"If any man will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). The fundamental condition for obtaining spiritual knowledge, discernment and assurance, is a genuine determination to carry out the revealed will of God in our daily lives. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments" (Psa. 111:10). Capacity to distinguish Truth from error consists not in vigour of intellect nor in natural learning, but in a sincere willingness and earnest desire to yield ourselves unto the Divine will. Where there is a genuine subjection to the Divine authority and a deep longing to please the Lord, even though it appears to be directly against our temporal interests and worldly prospects, and even though it involves fierce opposition from enemies and ostracism by our professed friends, there will be both spiritual discernment and assurance. Where the heart puts the glory of God before everything else it will be raised above and delivered from the prejudices of pride, self-love, carnal fears, and fleshly aspirations which cloud and bias the understanding of the unregenerate. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the LORD" (Hosea 6:3), is the sure promise.

Bagster's Interlinear gives a more literal translation of John 7:17: "If anyone desire His will to practice he shall know concerning the teaching, whether from God it is." The Greek word rendered "desire" signifies no fleeting impression or impulse but a deep-rooted determination. Certainty may be arrived at in connection with the things of God, but in order thereto the heart must first be right toward Him, that is, surrendered to Him. When there is a resolution to perform God's will at all costs, there will be a capacity and an enablement to discern and embrace the Truth and to detect and refute error. It is the state of our souls which makes us receptive to or repellent against the temptations and lies of the Enemy: when the heart is yielded to God and conformed to His will, we have no difficulty in seeing through the deceits of Satan. It is those who are governed by self-will and devoted to self-pleasing who fall such easy victims to "seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). The Truth frees from deception, but only as the Truth is appropriated and assimilated.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). Ah, but note well *to whom* this is said. The Lord does not predicate this of all who make a bare profession of faith: it is very far from being a knowledge common to all in Christendom. The "ye" is definitely restricted to God's own people, to those who have entered the strait gate and are walking in the narrow way of the immediate context. True, even they need to be on their guard, but if they give heed to the warning of Christ, as assuredly they will, they shall at once recognize these impostors. *Ye* shall know them: but none others will. It is because the sheep "follow" the good Shepherd that "they know His voice," and because they know His voice "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:4, 5). It is the obedient ear, and that only, which distinguishes between the voice of the true and the false shepherds. If the ear be attuned to the precepts of Scripture it will reject the sophistries of religious charlatans.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth

evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16-20). In these words our Lord intimates that His people should have no difficulty in recognizing the false prophets: if they do but exercise ordinary precaution they will detect the imposture which is sought to be played upon them. The masqueraders are to be identified by their "fruits." At a distance, trees look very much the same, but a closer inspection of them enables us to distinguish the fruitful from the fruitless ones, and whether the fruit is wholesome or injurious. In like manner there needs to be a careful examination of those who appear before us as the servants of God, that the true ones may be distinguished from the counterfeit.

Last month we suggested that there is a three-fold reference in the "fruits" produced by the false prophets, namely, their creed, their character, and their converts. Having dwelt therein at some length on the first let us say a few words now upon the second and third. The character of these men is clearly indicated by Christ's descriptive words, "inwardly they are ravening wolves." It was none other than the Lord of Love who employed what this supercilious generation would term "harsh language." Love is faithful as well as gentle, and it was love to His own which moved Christ to tear off the disguise and reveal these enemies of His flock in their real character. He who denounced the scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites" and "blind guides," and termed Herod "that fox" (Luke 13:32), hesitated not to brand these subtle deceivers as "ravening wolves." When a bottle of deadly poison is placed among others containing healing lotions it needs to be plainly labeled: that is why we definitely mention the "Plymouth Brethren" when warning against the false prophets of our day.

That Christ here left an example for His servants to follow appears clearly from the instance of the Apostle Paul. When taking leave of the elders of the Ephesian church, he warned them, "after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples *after them*" (Acts 20:29, 30). In that last clause we have another mark of the false prophets. They are inveterate proselytizers. They continually obtrude themselves upon people's attention. They are ever creeping into houses "leading captive silly women led away with divers lusts" (2 Tim. 3:6). They are continually coaxing and wheedling folk to come to their meetings. But the true Prophet never attempts guile or presses anyone to attend his services. No, he is content to follow his Master's practice: "he that hath ears to hear let him hear," and there he leaves it. When a place receives them not they "go their ways" (Luke 10:10) instead of pleading and arguing and seeking to draw disciples "after them."

"But inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). What a solemn but suggestive and revealing word is that. The wolf, like the fox, is tricky and treacherous, subtle and sly, hence the words "cunning craftiness" in connection with the purveyors of error who "lie in wait to deceive" of Ephesians 4:14. They scruple not to employ the most dishonourable tactics and resort to tricks which honest men of the world would scorn to use. The wolf is cruel and merciless: so are these deceivers of souls. They prate about love, but they are full of hatred toward those who expose them. They are greedy, having voracious appetites, and false prophets are men of insatiable ambition, hungry for applause, avaricious. Jeremiah 23:32 speaks of their "lightness" or irreverence and Zephaniah 3:4

also says, "their prophets are light and treacherous." So far from being sober and solemn they are frivolous and frothy: it cannot be otherwise, for the fear of God is not upon them.

"By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). Not by their profession, nor their sanctimoniousness, nor their zeal—but their "fruits"—we understand, thirdly, *the converts* they make. The parent is more or less reproduced in his children. In Jeremiah 23:16 it is said of those who give ear to the false prophets "they make you vain." Egotistical themselves, their disciples are also conceited. They are proud of their letter-knowledge of the Scriptures, boastful of their orthodoxy. They claim to have light which those in the "man-made systems" are without. But their walk betrays them—no traces of humility, no mourning over sin, no experimental acquaintance with the plague of their hearts. They loudly boast of their assurance but produce not the evidences on which Scriptural assurance is based. They prate about eternal security but refuse to examine their hearts and see whether they are in the faith. They have much to say about their peace and joy but are strangers to the groanings of Romans 7. They boast they are "not under the Law" and give proof thereof in their characters and conduct.

In conclusion, let us anticipate a question: why does God permit these false prophets which work such havoc in Christendom? This is a very solemn question and we must restrict ourselves to what the Scriptures say by way of reply. "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that [false] prophet, or the dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God proveth you to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:3). From those words it is clear that God suffers teachers of error for the same reason as He does persecutors of His people—to test their love, to try their fidelity, to show that their loyalty to Him is such that they will not give ear unto His enemies. Error has always been more popular than the Truth, for it lets down the bars and fosters fleshly indulgence. And for that very reason it is obnoxious to the godly. The one who by grace can say, "I have chosen the way of Truth" will be able to add, "I have *stuck unto* Thy testimonies" (Psa. 119:30, 31), none being able to move him therefrom.

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19). Error serves as a flail, separating the chaff from the wheat. Let some plausible and popular preacher come forward with an old error decked out in new clothes and empty professors will at once flock to his standard—but not so with those who are established in the faith. Thus, by means of the false prophets God makes it appear who are the ones who hold the Truth in sincerity. They are faithful to Him despite all temptations to turn away unto a "broader-minded" way. The genuine gold endures every test to which it is subjected. Thus, too, are the unregenerate "converts" revealed—the counterfeit gold will not withstand the fire. Those who are attracted by a novelty do not last but are soon carried away by some newer innovation. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were *not* all of us" (1 John 2:19). Thus, they who turn away from orthodoxy to heterodoxy must not be regarded as real Christians.

The false prophets are also ordained of God for the punishment of those who receive not the love of the Truth. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Ahab could not endure Elijah and Mi-

caiah the servants of God, therefore he was suffered to follow the priests of Baal unto his destruction.

It is very clear from Matthew 24:5, 11, etc., that Israel's rejection of Christ was followed by the appearing of many false christs in their midst who fatally deceived large numbers of the Jews. It was not until primitive and genuine Christianity had been jettisoned that the religious world was plagued by the monster of Romanism. A very large proportion of those found in the false cults of our day were once members of or regular attendees at churches which were more or less sound in the Faith. Beware, my reader, if you despise God's Truth you will fall in love with Satan's lies.—A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

3. *His Testing.*

Last month we pointed out that the peculiar relation which existed between Elijah and Elisha foreshadowed that which pertains to Christ and His servants, and that the early experiences through which Elisha passed are those which, substantially, each genuine minister of the Gospel is called upon to encounter. All the preliminary details recorded of the Prophet ere his mission commenced must have their counterpart in the early history of any who is used of God in the work of His kingdom. Those experiences in the case of Elisha began with a definite call from the Lord, and that is still His order of procedure. That call was followed by a series of very real testings, which may well be designated a preliminary course of discipline. Those testings were many and varied. They were seven in number, which at once indicates the thoroughness and completeness of the ordeals through which Elisha went and by which he was schooled for the future. If we are not to ignore here the initial one there will of necessity be a slight overlapping between this section and what was before us last month.

First, the testing of his *affections*. This occurred at the time he received his call to devote the whole of his time and energies to the service of God and His people. A stern test it was. Elisha was not one who had failed in temporal matters and now desired to better his position, nor was he deprived of those who cherished him and so anxious to enter a more congenial circle. Far from it. He was the son of a well-to-do farmer, living with parents to whom he was devotedly attached. Response to Elijah's casting of the prophetic mantle upon him meant not only the giving up of favourable worldly prospects but the severing of happy home ties. The issue was plainly drawn. Which should dominate?—zeal for Jehovah or love for his parents? That Elisha was very far from being one of a cold and unfeeling disposition is clear from a number of things. When Elijah bade him remain at Bethel, he replied, "I will not leave thee" (2 Kings 2:2). And when his master was caught away from him he evidenced his deep grief by crying out, "my father! my father" and by rending his garments asunder (v. 12).

No, Elisha was no stoic, and it cost him something to break away from his loved ones. But he shrank not from the sacrifice demanded of him. He "left the oxen" with which he had been plowing and "ran after Elijah" asking only, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee" (1 Kings 19:20). Permission being granted, a hasty and farewell speech was made and he took his departure. The sacred narrative contains no mention that he ever returned home even for a brief visit. Dutiful respect, yea tender regard, was shown for his parents, but he did not prefer them before God. The Lord does not require His servants to callously ignore their filial duty, but He does claim the first place in their hearts. Unless one who is contemplating an entrance into the ministry is definitely prepared to accord Him that, he should at once abandon his quest. No man is eligible for the ministry unless he is ready to resolutely subordinate natural ties to spiritual bonds. Blessedly did the spirit prevail over the flesh in Elisha's response to this initial trial.

Second, the testing of his sincerity. This occurred at the outset of the final journey of the two Prophets. "And it came to pass when the Lord would take up Elijah into Heaven by a whirlwind that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee" (2 Kings. 2:1, 2). Various reasons have been advanced by the commentators as to why the Tishbite should have made such a request. Some think it was

because he wished to be alone, that modesty and humility would not suffer that his companion should witness the very great honour which was about to be bestowed upon him. Others suppose it was because he desired to spare Elisha the grief of a final leave-taking. But in view of all that follows and taking this detail in connection with the whole incident, we believe these words of the Prophet bear quite a different interpretation, namely, that Elijah was now making proof of Elisha's determination and attachment to him. At the time of his call Elisha had said, "I will follow thee," and now he was given the opportunity to go back if he were so disposed

There was one who accompanied the Apostle Paul for awhile, but later Paul had to lament, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world and is departed into Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). Many have done likewise—daunted by the difficulties of the way, discouraged by the unfavourable response to their efforts, their ardour cooled and they concluded they had mistaken their calling. Or, because only small and unattractive fields opened to them, they decided to better themselves by returning to worldly employment. To what numbers do those solemn words of Christ apply: "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Far otherwise was it with Elisha. No fleeting impression had actuated him when he declared to Elijah, "I will follow thee," and when he was put to the proof as to whether or not he was prepared to follow him to the end of the course, he successfully stood the test and gave evidence of his unwavering fidelity. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," was his unflinching response. O for like stability!

Third, the testing of his *will* or resolution. From Gilgal Elijah and his companion had gone on to Bethel, and there he encountered a subtle temptation, one which had prevailed over any whose heart was not thoroughly established. "And the sons of the Prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, Know thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?" (2 Kings 2:3). Which was as much as saying, Why think of going on any further, what is the use of it, when the Lord is on the point of taking him from thee? And mark it well, they who here sought to make him waver from his course were not the agents of Jezebel but those who were on the side of the Lord. Nor was it just one who would deter Elisha, but apparently the whole body of the Prophets endeavoured to persuade him that he should relinquish his purpose. It is in this very way God tries the metal of His servants—to make evident to themselves and others whether they are vacillating or steadfast, whether they are regulated wholly by His call and will or whether their course is directed by the counsels of men.

A holy independence is to mark the servant of God. Thus it was with the chief of the Apostles: "I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). Had he done so, what trouble would he have made for himself! Had he listened to the varied advice the other Apostles would proffer, what a state of confusion his own mind had been in! If Christ is my Master, then it is from Him, and from Him alone, I must take my orders. Until I am sure of His will I must continue to wait upon Him. Once it is clear to me, I must set out on the performance of it and nothing must move me to turn aside. So it was here. Elisha had been Divinely called to follow Elijah and he was determined to cleave to him unto the end, even though it meant going against the well-meant advice and offending the whole of his fellows. "Hold ye your peace" was his reply. This was one of the trials which the present writer encountered over thirty years ago when his pastor and Christian friends

urged him to enter a theological seminary, though they knew that deadly error was taught there. It was not easy to take his stand against them, but I am deeply thankful I did so.

Fourth, the testing of his *faith*. “And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here I pray thee, for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho” (2 Kings 2:4). “Tarry *here*.” They were at Bethel, and this was a place of sacred memories. It was here that Jacob had spent his first night as he fled from the wrath of his brother. Here he had been favoured with that vision of the ladder whose top reached unto Heaven and beheld the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Here it was Jehovah had revealed Himself and given him precious promises. When he awakened, Jacob said, “Surely the LORD is in this place....this is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven” (Gen. 28). Delectable spot was this: the place of Divine communion. Ah, one which is supremely attractive to those who are spiritually-minded and therefore one which such are entirely loath to leave. What can be more desirable than to abide where such privileges and favours are enjoyed! So felt Peter on the holy mount. As he beheld Christ transfigured and Moses and Elijah talking with Him, he said, “Lord, it is good to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—let us remain and enjoy such bliss. But that could not be.

God still tests His servants at this very point. They are in some place where the smile of Heaven manifestly rests upon their labours. The Lord’s presence is real, His secrets are revealed to them and intimate communion is enjoyed with Him. If he followed his own inclinations he would remain there, but he is not free to please himself—he is the servant of Another and must do *His* bidding. Elijah had announced, “the LORD hath sent me to Jericho.” And if Elisha was to “follow” him to the end, then to Jericho he, too, must go. True, Jericho was far less attractive than Bethel, but the will of God pointed clearly to it. It is not the consideration of his own tastes and comforts which is to actuate the minister of Christ but the performance of duty—no matter where it leads to. The mount of transfiguration made a powerful appeal unto Peter, but at the base thereof there was a demon-possessed youth in dire need of deliverance (Matt. 17:14-18)! Elisha resisted the tempting prospect, saying again, “I will not leave thee.” O for like fidelity!

Fifth, the testing of his *patience*. This was a two-fold one. When the two Prophets arrived at Jericho the younger one suffered a repetition of what he had experienced at Bethel. Once again “the sons of the Prophets” from the local school accosted him, saying, “Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head today?” Elijah himself they left alone, but his companion was set upon by them. It is the connection in which this occurs that supplies the key to its meaning. The whole passage brings before us Elisha being tested first in one way and then at another. That he should meet with a repetition at Jericho of what he had encountered at Bethel is an intimation that the servant of God needs to be specially on his guard at this point. He must not put his trust even in “princes,” temporal or spiritual, but cease entirely from man, trusting in the Lord and leaning not unto his own understanding. Though it was annoying to be pestered thus by these men, Elisha made them a courteous reply, yet one which showed them he was not to be turned away from his purpose: “Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace.”

“And Elijah said unto him, Tarry I pray thee here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan” (2 Kings 2:6). This he said to prove him, as the Saviour tested the two disciples on the way to Emmaus when He “made as though He would have gone further” (Luke 24:29). Much ground had been traversed since they had set out together from Gilgal. Was

Elisha growing tired of the journey or was he prepared to persevere unto the end? How many grow weary of well-doing and fail to reap because they faint. How many fail at this point of testing and drop out when Providence appears to afford them a favourable opportunity of so doing. Elisha might have pleaded: I may be of some service here to the young Prophets, but of what use can I be to Elijah at the Jordan? Philip was being greatly used of God in Samaria (Acts 8:12) when the angel of the Lord bade him arise and go south “unto Gaza, which is *desert*” (v. 26). And he arose and went, and God honoured his obedience. And Elisha said to his master, “I will not leave thee,” no, not at the eleventh hour—and great was his reward.

Sixth, the testing of his *character*. “And it came to pass, when they were gone over (the Jordan) that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee” (2 Kings 2:9). Here is clear proof that Elijah had been making trial of his companion when he had at the different stopping places bade him, “Tarry here,” or remain behind, for certainly he had extended no such an offer as this had he been disobedient and acting in self-will. Clearly the Tishbite was so well-pleased with Elisha’s devotion and attendance that he determined to reward him with some parting blessing: “Ask what I shall do for thee.” If this was not the most searching of all the tests certainly it was the most revealing. What was his heart really set upon? What did he desire above all else? At first glance it seemed surprising that Elijah should fling open so wide a door and offer to supply anything his successor should ask. But not only had they spent several years together, Elisha’s reaction to the other testings convinced him that this faithful soul would ask nothing which was incongruous or which God could not give.

“And Elisha said, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” He rose above all fleshly and worldly desires, all that the natural heart would crave, and asked for that which would be most for the glory of God and the good of His people. Elisha sought neither wealth nor honours, worldly power or prestige. What he asked for was that he might receive that which marked him out as Elijah’s firstborn, the heir of his official patrimony (Deut. 21:17). It was a noble request. The work to which he was called involved heavy responsibilities and the facing of grave dangers, and for the discharge of his duties he needed to be equipped with *spiritual* power. That is what every servant of God needs above everything else—to be “endued with power from on high.” The most splendid faculties, the ablest intellect, the richest acquirements count for nothing unless they are energized by the Holy One. The work of the ministry is such that no man is naturally qualified for it: only God can make any man meet for the same. For that endowment the Apostles waited upon God for ten days. To obtain it Elisha had to successfully endure the previous testings, pass through Jordan and keep his eye fixed steadily upon his master.

Seventh, the testing of his *endowment*. When we ask God for something it is often His way to test our earnestness and importunity by keeping us waiting for it, and then when He grants our request, to put our fidelity to the proof in the *use* we make of the same. If it is faith that is bestowed, circumstances arise which are apt to call into exercise all our doubts and fears. If it is wisdom which is given, situations soon confront us where we are sorely tempted to give way to folly. If it is courage which is imparted, then perils will have to be faced which are calculated to make the stoutest quake. When we receive some spiritual gift, God so orders things that opportunity is afforded for the exercise of it. It was thus with Elisha. A double portion of Elijah’s spirit was granted him and the Prophetic mantle of his master fell at his feet. What use would he make of the same? As this

comes before us **next month**, suffice it now to say that he was confronted by the Jordan—he was on the wrong side of it and no longer was there any Elijah to divide asunder its waters!

We turn now from the testings to which Elisha was subjected unto *the course* which he had to take: the spiritual significance of his journey has also to receive its counterpart in the experiences of the servant of Christ. That journey began at *Gilgal* (2 Kings 2:1) and none can work acceptably in the kingdom of God until his soul is acquainted with what that place stands for. It was the first stopping-place of Israel after they entered Canaan, and where they were required to tarry ere they set out on the conquest of their inheritance (Josh. 5:9). It was there that all the males who had been born in the wilderness were circumcised. Now “circumcision” speaks of separation from the world, consecration to God, and the knife’s application to the flesh. Figuratively it stood for the cutting off of the old life, the rolling away of “the reproach of Egypt.” There is a circumcision “of the heart” (Rom. 2:29) and it is that which is the distinguishing mark of God’s spiritual children as circumcision of the flesh had identified His earthly people. Gilgal then, is where the path of God’s servant must necessarily begin: not until he unsparingly mortifies the flesh, separates from the world and consecrates himself unreservedly to God is he prepared to journey further.

From Gilgal Elisha passed on to “Bethel” which means “the house of God.” As we have seen, it was originally the place of hallowed memories, but in the course of time it had been grievously defiled. Bethel had been horribly polluted, for it was there that Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves, appointed an idolatrous priesthood and led the people into terrible sin (1 Kings 12:28, 33; Amos 3:3-5). Elisha must visit this place so that he might be suitably affected with the dishonour done unto the Lord. History has repeated itself. The House of God, the professing Church, is defiled and the servant of Christ must take to heart the apostate condition of Christendom today if his ministry is to be effective. From Bethel they proceeded to Jericho: a place that was under God’s curse (Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34). The servant of God needs to enter deeply into the solemn fact that this world is under the curse of a holy God. And what is that “curse”? Death (Rom. 6:23), and it is of that the Jordan (the final stopping-place) speaks. That, too, must be passed through in the experience of his soul if the minister is to be effectual.—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

7. Its Perversion.

Nowhere is the depravity of man and the enmity of their minds against God more terribly displayed than in the treatment which His Holy Word receives at their hands. By many it is criminally neglected, by others it is wickedly wrested and made to teach the most horrible heresies. To slight such a revelation, to despise such an inestimable treasure, is an insult which the Most High will certainly avenge. To corrupt the sacred Scriptures, to force from them a meaning the opposite of what they bear, to handle them deceitfully by picking and choosing from their contents is a crime of fearful magnitude. Yet this, in varying measure, is what all the false cults of Christendom are guilty of. Unitarians, Universalists and those who teach the unconsciousness of the soul between death and resurrection and the annihilation of the wicked, single out certain snippets of Scripture but ignore or explain away anything which makes against them. A very high percentage of the errors propagated by the pulpit are nothing more or less than Truth itself, but the Truth distorted and perverted.

Broadly speaking the doctrine which we have been expounding in this series has been perverted by two main classes. First, by open Arminians, who expressly repudiate most of what has been advanced in the preceding articles. With them we are not here directly concerned. Second, by what we can only designate "mongrel Calvinists." This class deny the sovereign and unconditional election of God and also the limited or particular redemption of Christ. They are one with Arminians in believing that election is based on God's foreknowledge of those who would believe the Gospel, and they affirm Christ atoned for the sins of all of Adam's race, and yet they term themselves "Calvinists" because they hold the eternal security of the saints, or "once in grace, always in grace." In their crude and ill-balanced presentation of this doctrine they woefully pervert the Truth and do incalculable damage unto those who give ear to them. As they do not all proceed along exactly the same line to distort the Truth at the same particular point, we will divide this branch of our subject so as to cover as many errors as possible.

1. It is perverted by those who affirm mere professors with what pertains only to the regenerate. Here is a young man who attends a service at church where a "special evangelistic campaign" is being held. He is not seriously inclined, in fact rarely enters a place of worship, but is visiting only now to please a friend. The evangelist makes a fervent emotional appeal and many are induced to "go forward" and be prayed for—our young man among them—again to please his friend. He is persuaded to "become a Christian" by signing a "decision card." And then he is congratulated on the "manly step" he has taken. He is duly "received into the church," and at once given a class of boys in the "Sunday School." He is conscious there has been no change within and though somewhat puzzled supposes the preacher and church-members know more about the matter than he does. *They* regard him as a Christian and assure him he is now safe for eternity.

Here is another young man who is passing a "Gospel Hall" on a Lord's Day evening; attracted by the hearty singing, he enters. The speaker expatiates at length on John 3:16 and similar passages. He declares with much vigour that God loves everybody and points out in proof thereof that He gave His Son to die for the sins of all mankind. The unsaved are urged to believe this and are told that the only thing which can now send them to Hell is their unbelief. As soon as the service is over the speaker makes for our young man and asks him if he is saved. Upon receiving a negative reply, he asks, "Would you like to be,

here and now?" Acts 16:31 is read to him and he is asked, "Will you believe?" If he says yes, John 5:24 is quoted to him and he is told that he is now eternally secure. He is welcomed into the homes of these new friends, frequents their meetings and is addressed as "Brother."

The above are far more than imaginary cases: we have come into personal contact with many from both classes. And what was the sequel? In the great majority of instances the tide of emotion and enthusiasm soon subsided, the novelty quickly wore off, attending "Bible readings" soon palled, and the dog returned to its vomit and the sow to her wallowing in the mire. They were then regarded as "backsliders" and perhaps told, "The Lord will bring you back again into the fold." And some of these man-made converts are foolish enough to believe their deceivers and assured that "once saved, saved forever." They go on their worldly way with no trepidation as to the ultimate outcome. They have been fatally deceived. And what of their deceivers? They are guilty of perverting the Truth, they have cast pearls before swine, they have taken the children's bread and thrown it to the dogs. They gave to empty professors what pertained only to the regenerate.

2. It is perverted by those who fail to insist upon *credible evidences of regeneration*, as is the case with the above examples. The burden of proof always rests upon the one who affirms. When a person claims that he is a Christian, that claim does not make him one, and if he is mistaken, it certainly is not kindness on my part to confirm him in a delusion. A church is weakened spiritually in proportion to the number of its unregenerate members. Regeneration is a *supernatural* work of *grace* and therefore it is a great insult to the Holy Spirit to imagine that there is not a radical difference between one who has been miraculously quickened by Him and one who is dead in trespasses and sins—between one who is indwelt by Him and one in whom Satan is working (Eph. 2:2). Not until we see clear evidence that a supernatural work of grace has been wrought in a soul are we justified in regarding him as a brother in Christ. The tree is known by the fruit it bears: good fruit must be manifested on its branches ere we can identify it as a good tree.

We will not enter into a laboured attempt to describe at length the principal birth-marks of a Christian. Instead we will mention some things which, if they are absent, indicate that "the root of the matter" (Job 19:28) is not in the person. One who regards sin lightly, who thinks nothing of breaking a promise, who is careless in the performance of temporal duties, who gives no sign of a tender conscience which is exercised over what are commonly called "trifles," lacks the one thing needful. A person who is vain and self-important, who pushes to the fore seeking the notice of others, who parades his fancied knowledge and attainments, has not learned of Him who is "meek and lowly in heart." One who is hyper-sensitive, who is deeply hurt if someone slights them, who resents a word of reproof no matter how kindly spoken, betrays the lack of a humble and teachable spirit. One who frets over disappointments, murmurs each time his will is crossed and rebels against the dispensations of Providence exhibits a will which has not been Divinely subdued.

That a person belongs to some "evangelical church" or "assembly" and is regular in his attendance there, is no proof that he is a member of the Church which is Christ's (mystical) body. That a person goes about with a Bible in his hand is no guaranty that the Divine Law is within his heart. Though he may talk freely and fluently about spiritual things, of what worth is it if they do not regulate his daily walk? One who is dishonest in

business, undutiful in the home, thoughtless of others, censorious and unmerciful, has no title to be regarded as a new creature in Christ Jesus, no matter how saintly his pose be on the Sabbath Day. When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Christ's forerunner to be baptized of him, he said, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8): I must first see some signs of godly sorrow for sin, some manifestations of a change of heart, some tokens of a transformed life. So we must demand the evidences of regeneration before we are justified in crediting a Christian profession, otherwise we endorse what is false and bolster up one in his self-deceit.

3. It is perverted by those who sever the cause from its *necessary effect*. The cause of the believer's perseverance is one and indivisible, for it is Divine and nothing whatever of the creature is mingled with it; yet to our apprehension, at least, it appears as a compound one and we may view its component parts separately. The unchanging love, the immutable purpose, the Everlasting Covenant and the invincible power of God are conjoint elements in making the saint infallibly secure. But each of those elements is active and brings forth fruit after its own kind. God's love is not confined to the Divine bosom but is "shed abroad" in the hearts of His people by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), from whence it flows forth again unto its Giver: "we love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love is indeed feeble and fluctuating, yet it *exists*, and cannot be quenched, so that we can say with Peter, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." "I know My sheep and (though imperfectly) am known of Mine" (John 10:14) shows the response made.

The preacher who has much to say upon the love of God and little or nothing about the believer's love to Him is partial and fails in his duty. How can I ascertain that I am an object of God's love but by discovering the manifest effects of His love being shed abroad in my heart? "If any man *love God* the same is known of God" (1 Cor. 8:3). "All things work together for good to *them that love God*, to them who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). It is by their love for Him they give proof they are the subject of His effectual call. And how is genuine love for God to be identified? First, *by its eminency*: God is loved above all others so as He has no rival in the soul: "whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psa. 73:25). All things give way to His love: "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Psa 63:3). The real Christian is content to do and suffer anything rather than lose God's favour, for that is his all.

Second, true love for God may be recognized *by its component parts*. Repentance is a mourning love, because of the wrongs done its Beloved and the loss accruing to ourselves. Faith is a receptive love, thankfully accepting Christ and all His benefits. Obedience is a pleasing love, seeking to honour and glorify the One who has set His heart upon me. Filial fear is a restraining love which prevents me offending Him whom I esteem above all others. Hope is love expecting, anticipating the time when there shall be nothing to come between my soul and Him. Communion is love finding satisfaction in its Object. All true piety is the expression and outflow of love to God and those who bear His image. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is love desiring more of God and His holiness. Joy is the exuberance of love, delighting itself in its all-sufficient portion. Patience is love waiting for God to make good His promise, moving us to endure the trials of the way until He comes to our relief. Love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

Third, real love for God expresses itself in *obedience*. Where there is genuine love for God it will be our chief concern to please Him and fulfill His will. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:21). "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). Inasmuch as it is the love of an inferior to a superior it must show itself in a respectful subjection, in the performance of duty. God returns love with love: "I love them that love Me" (Prov. 8:17 and cf. John 14:21). "A Christian is rewarded as a lover rather than as a servant: not as doing work, but as doing work out of love" (Manton). If we love God we shall do His bidding, promote His interests, seek His glory. And this not sporadically but uniformly and constantly; not in being devout at certain set times and the observance of the Lord's Supper, but respecting His authority in all the details of our daily lives. Only thus does love perform its function and fulfill its design: "whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected (attains its proper goal): hereby know we that we *are* in Him" (1 John 2:5).

From what has been pointed out in the last three paragraphs it is clear that those who dwell upon the love of God for His people to the virtual exclusion of their love for Him do pervert the truth of the security of the saints, as the individual who persuades himself that he is the object of God's love without producing the fruit of his love for Him is treading on very dangerous ground. This divorcing of the necessary effect from its cause might be demonstrated just as conclusively of the other elements or parts, but because we entered into so much detail with the first we will barely state the other three. The immutability of God's purpose to conduct His elect to Heaven must not be considered as a thing apart; the means have been predestinated as much as the end, and they who despise the means perish. The very term "covenant" signifies a compact entered into by two or more persons, wherein terms are prescribed and rewards promised: nowhere has God promised covenant blessings to those who comply not with covenant stipulations. Nor have I any warrant to believe the saving power of God is working in me unless I am expressly proving the sufficiency of His grace.

4. It is perverted by those who *lose the balance of Truth* between Divine preservation and Christian perseverance. We may think it vastly more honouring unto God to write or say ten times as much about His sovereignty as we do upon man's responsibility, but that is only a vain attempt to be wise above what is written, and therefore is to display our own presumption and folly. We may attempt to excuse our failure by declaring it is a difficult matter to present the Divine supremacy and human accountability in their due proportions, but with the Word of God in our hands it will avail us nothing. The business of God's servant is not only to contend earnestly for the Faith but to set forth the Truth in its Scriptural proportions. Far more error consists in misrepresenting and distorting the Truth than in expressly repudiating it. Professing Christians are not deceived by an avowed infidel or atheist, but are taken in by men who quote and re-quote certain portions of Holy Writ, and are silent upon all the passages which clash with their lop-sided views.

Just as we may dwell so much upon the Deity of Christ as to lose sight of the reality of His humanity so we may become so occupied with God's keeping of His people as to overlook those verses where the Christian is bidden to keep himself. The incarnation in nowise changed or modified the fact that Christ was none other than Immanuel tabernacling among men, that "God was manifest in flesh," nevertheless we read, "Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Heb. 2:17), and again,

“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). The theanthropic person or the Mediator is grossly caricatured if either His Godhead or manhood be omitted from consideration. Whatever difficulty it may involve to our finite minds, whatever mystery which transcends our grasp, we must hold fast to the fact that the Child born, the Son given, was “the mighty God” (Isa. 9:6); nor must we suffer the truth of God’s garrisoning of His people to crowd out the necessity of their discharging their responsibility.

It is perfectly true there is a danger in the other side and that we need to be on our guard against erring in the opposite direction. Some have done so. There are those who consider the humanity of Christ could not be true humanity in the real sense of that word, arguing that His temptation was nothing more than a meaningless show unless He was capable of yielding to Satan’s attacks. One error leads to another. If the last Adam met the Devil on the same plane as did the first Adam, simply as a sinless man and if His victory (as well as all His wondrous works) is to be attributed solely to the power of the Holy Spirit, then it follows that the exercise of His divine prerogatives and attributes were entirely suspended during the years of His humiliation. Hence we find that those who hold this fantastic view endorse the “kenosis” theory interpreting the “made Himself of no reputation” of Philippians 2:7 as the temporary setting aside of His omniscience and omnipotence.

Contending for Christian perseverance no more warrants the repudiation of Divine preservation than insisting on the true manhood of Christ justifies the impugning of His Godhood. Both must be held fast: on the one hand reasoning must be bridled by refusing to go one step further than Scripture goes. On the other hand faith must be freely exercised, receiving all that God has revealed thereon. That which is central in Philippians 2:5-7 is the position Christ entered and the character in which He appeared. He who was “in the form of God” and deemed it not robbery “to be equal with God” took upon Him “the form of a servant” and was “made in the likeness of men.” He laid aside the robes of His incomprehensible glory, divested Himself of His incommunicable honours, and assumed the mediatorial office instead of continuing to act as the universal Sovereign. He descended into the sphere of servitude, yet without the slightest injury to His Godhead. There was voluntary abnegation of the exercise of full dominion and sovereignty, though He still remained “The Lord of Glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). He “became obedient unto death” but He did not become either feeble or fallible. He was and is both perfect man and “the mighty God.”

As the Person of the God-man Mediator is falsified if either His Godhead or manhood be denied, or perverted if either be practically ignored, so it is with the security of the saints when either their Divine preservation or their own perseverance is repudiated, or perverted if either be emphasized to the virtual exclusion of the other. Both must be maintained in their due proportions. Scripture designates our Saviour “the true God” (1 John 5:20), yet it also speaks of Him as “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). Again and again He is denominated “the Son of Man,” yet Thomas owned Him as “my Lord and my God.” So, too, the Psalmist affirmed, “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee, will not slumber...The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and for evermore” (121:3, 7, 8); nevertheless, He also declared, “By the Word of Thy lips I *have* kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (17:4), and again, “I have

kept the ways of the Lord...I have kept *myself* from mine iniquity (18:21, 23). Jude exhorts believers, “keep yourselves in the love of God,” and then speaks of Him, “that is able to keep you from falling” (21:24). The one complements, and not contradicts, the other.—A.W.P.

AN HONEST HEART.

If there is one thing more than another which we seek to keep in mind while preparing articles for these pages it is the need for and importance of preserving the *balance* of Truth, for we have long been convinced that untold harm has been done to souls through failure at this point. If the preacher gives a disproportionate place in his ministry to the Divine Law, relegating the Gospel to the background, not only are his hearers in danger of forming a one-sided concept of the Divine character but the Christian is deprived of that which is most needed for the establishing and growth of his faith in Christ. On the other hand if the Divine Law be virtually shelved so that its strictness, its breadth and its spirituality are not made known, light thoughts upon sin and superficial views of the holiness of God will be the inevitable result. Both the Law and the Gospel must be expounded and enforced if souls are to be acquainted with God as “light” (1 John 1:5) and as “love,” and if they are to render unto Him that which is His due.

In like manner there needs to be proportionate attention paid to both doctrinal and practical teaching, the one relating to instruction and the other concerning deportment. It is an essential part of the pulpit’s office to open up the foundational truths of the Christian Faith, for only thus will souls be fortified against error. It is ignorance of the Truth which causes so many to fall easy victims to Satan’s lies. Such doctrines as the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Holy Trinity, the Sovereignty of God, the Fall of man, the Everlasting Covenant, the Person and Office of the Mediator, the design and nature of the Atonement, the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, the Justification and Sanctification of the believer must be systematically taught if the minister would discharge his duty. Yet he must not confine himself to doctrine: they who feed on rich food and then take little or no exercise become sickly and useless—true alike naturally and spiritually. Faith must produce works if it be worth anything. Well-nurtured branches of the vine are for fruitfulness and not ornamentation. Christians are to “adorn the doctrine of God” (Titus 2:10) by a daily walk which glorifies Him and is a blessing to their fellows.

Once more—if the balance is to be preserved the preacher must see to it that he is careful to maintain a due proportion between the objective and subjective sides of the Truth. He fails miserably in the discharge of his duty if he neglects to probe the professor and search the conscience of his hearers. He needs to remind them frequently that God requires Truth “in the *inward* parts” (Psa. 51:6), that His Law must be written “upon the heart” (Heb. 8:10) if it is to exert any effectual power in the life. He is required to call his hearers to “examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5)—yea urge them to pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my ways” (Psa. 139:23). Multitudes of professing Christians mistake an intellectual assent to the letter of Scripture for a saving faith, and most of what they hear in so-called evangelical circles is only calculated to bolster them up in a false hope. He who is faithful in dealing with souls will frequently remind his hearers of Christ’s statement, “Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: but he that *doeth* the will of My Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

But the preacher needs to be much on his guard lest he overdoes what is termed “experimental preaching.” If he virtually confines himself to the lines specified in the preceding paragraph his hearers will become too introspective, too busily engaged in looking within, and instead of their assurance being strengthened, genuine Christians will be filled with doubts and questions about their state. To counteract that tendency the objective side of the Truth must also be empha-

sized. Christ in all the wonders and glories of His peerless Person, in the perfections of His mediatorial office, in the sufficiency of His atoning work, must be held up to view, so that the hearts of His redeemed may be drawn out to Him in faith, in love, in worship. They must be encouraged to “look unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) and “consider the Apostle and High Priest of their profession” (Heb. 3:1), for only thus will they be furnished with both incentives and strength to run the race that is set before them.

What has been pointed out above applies as much to the editor of a magazine as to the occupant of the pulpit. He must beware of being a “hobbyist”—always harping upon a favourite theme. Side by side with pressing the precepts of Scripture he must dwell upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Messages of exhortation must be balanced by messages of consolation. Articles which rebuke and lay low need to be followed by subjects which comfort the mourner and lift up the soul in praise to God. If on the one hand we read that the Lamb is to be eaten with “bitter herbs” (Exo. 12:8), right after we are told of the “tree” being cast into the bitter waters of Marah so that they were made sweet (Exo. 15:25). If the Word of God be likened to a “hammer” which breaks in pieces the hard heart (Jer. 23:29) and a sword to pierce even to “the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12)—we also find it being compared with “honey and the honeycomb” (Psa. 19:10). He who is wise will observe these things and seek grace to be regulated accordingly.

At present we are engaged with a particularly searching portion of the Sermon on the Mount, and one design we have in dwelling upon it in such detail is the testing and exposing of formal professors. It is therefore expedient that we should accompany these articles with a message that is intended to help (under God’s blessing) those of the unestablished saints who are liable to draw a false conclusion therefrom. If empty professors are ready to greedily devour that Bread which is the peculiar portion of God’s little ones, it is also true that not a few regenerate souls are prone to appropriate unto themselves that which applies only to hypocrites. If on the one side there are unregenerate people who firmly believe themselves to be real Christians, on the other side there are genuinely renewed souls who greatly fear they are not Christians at all—they who now conclude the profession of faith made by them, sincerely, in the past, was based on a delusion, and that after all they have been deceiving themselves and others—that they are hypocrites.

It is indeed a fearful thing for a soul to be living in “a fool’s paradise,” persuading one’s self all is well while in reality the wrath of God abides on him. But is it anything less tragic (even though less dangerous) for a child of God to live in “the slough of despond,” passing sentence of Divine condemnation upon himself when in fact God has blotted out his transgressions? Why allow Satan to rob me of all rest of soul when peace and joy are my birthright and legitimate portion? Perhaps, the reader replies, because I cannot help myself, the Enemy is too powerful for me. But my friend, Satan obtains his hold *by lies*, and his hold is broken as soon as we meet him with the Truth. He succeeds in seducing men into sinful acts by promising them pleasure and profit therefrom; but the child of God meets his evil suggestions by reminding himself that if he sows to the flesh he must of the flesh reap corruption. In the light of what God says are the fearful and certain consequences of sin, the lie of Satan is exposed and rendered powerless. Once you have good and solid reason to believe a work of grace has been wrought within you, pay no attention to the doubts which Satan seeks to cast thereon.

But something much graver and more grievous is involved than an act of folly when a child of God accredits Satan's lie that he is but a deceived soul and hypocrite: he dishonours and insults *the Holy Spirit!* A genuine Christian would be horrified at giving place to the delusion that the redemption of Christ is imperfect and inadequate, that His atoning blood is not sufficient to cleanse from sin, that it must be plussed with something from the creature. And ought he not to be equally horrified at calling into question the reality and efficacy of the Spirit's work in regeneration, supposing it is not to be credited unless it is regularly confirmed by certain feelings of which we are the subjects? Is it any less a sin to deny or even doubt the work of the Holy Spirit than it is to deny or doubt the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ? Are we as diligent in seeking to guard against the one as much as the other? It is much to be feared that few even among the saints regard these sins as being equally grave. Ah, my reader, it is a vile thing for me to affirm that I am unregenerate if there is clear proof—obtainable by comparing myself with God's unerring Word—that the blessed Spirit of God has quickened me into newness of life. Plain warning against this enormity has not been sufficiently given by the pulpit.

What is meant, it may be asked, by the "clear proof" which God's Word presents to the renewed of their regeneration? That is a most important question, for ignorance thereon or a mistaken conception of the nature of that proof has kept many a quickened soul from enjoying that spiritual peace and assurance to which he was justly entitled. Unless I know what are the principal features of a born-again soul, how can I compare or contrast myself with them? If I form my own idea of what it is which fundamentally and experimentally distinguishes a Christian from a non-Christian, or if I derive my concept from the ideas and confessions of fellow mortals instead of allowing it to be molded by the teaching of Holy Writ, then I am certain to err. How many, for example, suppose that regeneration consists of a radical change of the old nature, a transforming of the flesh into the beauty of holiness—and then because they discover there is still a sink of iniquity within and sin now rages even more fiercely than it did formerly, draw the conclusion that most certainly no miracle of grace has been wrought within them?

Now in the parable of the Sower, the first recorded one of Christ's, we find what should be of great comfort to the fearing and trembling ones of the flock, for if they will carefully compare themselves with the different characters which are depicted in that parable, they ought to be able to perceive *which of them* portrays their *own* case and describes their own condition, and thus ascertaining which company they really belong. But in order to this there must be a genuine and frank looking of facts in the face. On the one hand, there must be no undue eagerness to believe the best of themselves, refusing to recognize their own features if the mirror of the Word reflects them as ugly ones. And on the other hand there must be no stubborn determination to go on believing the worst of themselves, declining to identify their picture even when it is drawn by the heavenly Artist, simply because it depicts their countenance as made comely by the operations of Divine grace. Mock humility and feigned modesty are as much a sin as pride and presumption. David was not boasting when he said, "How love I Thy Law," nor was Paul when he said, "I have fought a good fight." Each spoke the truth, but gave God the glory for his experience.

In the parable of the Sower our Lord sets before us the reception which the preaching of God's Word meets with. He likens the world to a field, which He divides into four parts according to the different kinds of its ground or soil. In His interpretation of the parable Christ explained those different soils as representing various classes of those who hear the Word. They

may be termed the hard-hearted, the hollow-hearted, the half-hearted, and the honest-hearted. The importance of this particular parable appears in the fact that it is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all three narratives should be carefully compared in order to obtain the complete pictures set forth. In this parable Christ is speaking not from the standpoint of the Divine counsels, for there can be no failure there—but from that of human accountability. What we have here is the Word of the Kingdom addressed to man's responsibility, the effect it has on him, his response thereto, and the reasons why the outcome is unfruitfulness or fruitfulness.

The first class are the wayside hearers. In eastern countries the public highway often runs right through the centre of a field, and because of the traffic constantly passing over it is beaten down, packed, and becomes hard and unyielding. Such is the heart of all those who are given up to the commerce, the pleasures and fashions of this world. They may from various motives attend the house of prayer, but the preaching of the Word has no effect upon them: they are unresponsive thereto. They do not go there seeking a blessing and their souls are unaffected by what they hear. They do not cry unto God, "that which I see not teach Thou me" (Job 34:32), for they are not concerned for His glory or their own eternal welfare. They have no real personal interest in spiritual things and are quite unimpressed by the most solemn representations and unmoved by the most winsome appeals. Their bodies are in the pews but their minds are elsewhere, their thoughts are upon the things that perish, their affections set on things below. They are not there to worship God and are glad when the service is over.

Now let us notice the two things which are said of this class. First, "when anyone heareth the Word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not" (Matt. 13:19). How could the message have any effect upon him when he failed to grasp its purport? And how could he expect to enter into its meaning when his attention was not concentrated thereon, when his interest was elsewhere? He has none but himself to blame. If he prays not for light, whose fault is it that he remains in darkness!? Second, "then cometh the Wicked One and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." Where there has been no meditation upon the Word heard or read, no understanding thereof, and so, no impression made upon the heart, it is an easy matter for the great Enemy of God and man to catch away the good Seed or crowd out of the mind that which obtained a superficial entrance, so that there will not even be serious reflection thereon. Now my reader, are you prepared to solemnly and definitely affirm that you have no understanding of the Word of God, that it is entirely to you as if written in an unknown tongue, that Satan has so caught it away it has no place in your thoughts?

The second-class are the stony-ground hearers. The type of ground referred to here is that where the bed or base is of rock yet with a thin layer of earth over it. Into this shallow soil the seed is received but the result is most superficial and evanescent. It cannot be otherwise, for as our Lord points out, "they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away." Those who belong to this class are what may be termed the emotional type. They are very impressionable, easily moved, quickly stirred. Yet it is all on the surface. They make good resolutions and quickly break them. They hear the Gospel and are carried away by the eloquence of the preacher and leap into Christ as it were in a moment, and profess an instantaneous faith in Him. Their faces are radiant and their joy is exuberant. They are the ones who come "forward" at Revival meetings and rush into church membership, but their future history is most disappointing.

Let us take note of the three things said of this class. First, “the same is he which heareth the Word and anon (instantly) with joy receiveth it.” The emotions have been stirred, but the conscience has not been searched. There was no awe of soul in realizing Who it is with whom we have to do, no heart-rending horrors of the sinfulness of sin, no alarm at the wrath to come—nothing but a sudden, yet transient, joy. Second, “yet hath he no root in himself.” It was only a surface effect, a mere passing sentiment. There has been no plowing up of the soul, no Law-work producing deep and lasting convictions. Third, “but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended” (Matt. 13:20, 21). Their “goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew that goeth away” (Hosea 6:4) The scoffs of the ungodly, the cold shoulder from old friends prove too much for them, and the churches know them no more. Now my reader, test yourself at this point: has your experience stood the test of time or have you abandoned your profession and returned to your wallowing in the mire?

The third class are the thorny-ground hearers. The type of ground here referred to is where the soil seems to be more fertile and favourable, for it is neither so beaten down as to have an impenetrable surface nor so shallow that there is no room for root. But it is inimical to a desirable crop, for weeds and thistles, thorns and briars choke and crowd out the good seed so that an harvest is prevented. This is admittedly the most difficult class to diagnose. The seed has taken root and a shoot springs up and promises well, but it is surrounded by hostile weeds. However, it survives and puts forth an ear, but it is so festooned with briars that the sunshine cannot reach it—its life is choked, and it comes to nothing. They who belong to this class attempt to serve two masters. They are very pious on the Lord’s Day, but thoroughly impious on the other days. They sing the songs of Zion, are members of a church, but make no serious attempt to regulate their daily lives by the precepts of Holy Writ.

Let us take note of Christ’s interpretation of the thorns. In Matthew 13:22 they are defined as “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.” The one who has made a Christian profession is young. He has a growing family, his position in this world is not yet secured and therefore he cannot be expected to be out and out for the Lord. Once he “makes good in life” he will have more leisure for spiritual things and more to give to the cause of Christ. Meanwhile temporal anxieties weigh him down. Suppose he “makes good”—does the Lord *now* have the first place in his affections and thoughts? Far from it—riches are deceitful and cumber their possessor. He feels he must live in accord with his improved position, do more entertaining, send his children to college. Mark 4:19 adds “the lust of other things entering in”—perhaps he aspires to civic office or membership in Parliament, and how can he spirituality thrive in politics! Luke 8-14 gives “the pleasures of this life.” These are the thorns which choke so many, and they “bring no fruit to perfection” or completion. Would you say, my readers, that the “thorns” have so choked the Word of God in you that you have brought no fruit to completion?

The fourth class are the good-ground hearers. This is soil which not only receives the seed and has depth to give it root, but where it springs up, bears fruit and actually brings forth a goodly yield, so that the husbandman is well-rewarded for his labours. Let us take careful note then of what is here predicated of the good-ground hearer. First, it is, “he that heareth the Word and *understandeth it.*” He has taken pains so to do. He has “searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11) to ascertain whether or not the things to which he has listened are really according to the Divine Oracles, for he feels there is far too much at stake to take any man’s say-so for it. Mark

4:20 adds, “and *receive* it.” He has prayerfully pondered what he has heard and personally appropriates it as God’s message to his own soul. However unpalatable to the flesh, however searching and humbling, he refuses it not. Luke 8:15 adds “and *keep* it and bring forth fruit *with patience*.” He holds fast the Word because it is treasured up in his heart as his most cherished possession, and though he is much discouraged by the slowness of his growth he perseveres in crying to God for the increase.

But there is one word said concerning this fourth class which we wish to particularly observe: they are the ones who receive the Word “In an *honest* and good heart.” This is the only time in the parable that our Lord defines the kind of heart which received the Word. It is here we have disclosed the decisive factor, that which fundamentally distinguishes those belonging to the fourth class from all the others. Thus it is of prime importance we should seek to ascertain exactly what is connoted by “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15), and diligently search ourselves whether or not we possess such. Clearly the terms used here by Christ are in designed contrast from Jeremiah 17:9—“the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” which describes that which every descendant of Adam is born with. “An honest and good heart” then is not the natural heart, but one which Divine grace has imparted.—A. W. P.

