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AN EVANGELICAL SPIRIT.

Once more we employ a term which does not occur in so many letters and syllables on the pages of Holy Writ. Though its sound is not heard there the sense and substance of it most certainly is and it is one which we can scarcely avoid using if we are to express ourselves accurately and intelligently. While all men are essentially “legalistic” by nature none save those to whom the Gospel of Christ has been made the power of God unto salvation is possessed of a truly “evangelical” spirit. The terms are antithetical, as much so as are darkness and light, bondage and liberty. The one is the product of the Fall, the other is the fruit of regeneration. The one is the breathing of self-righteousness the other is the outcome of self-renunciation. The one is the work of pride and independence, the other is the outflow of humility and dependence. The one is the enmity which the carnal mind has against the grace of God, the other is the acquiescence of the renewed mind in undeserved mercy.

An evangelical spirit is found where the heart beats in accord with the essence and substance of the Gospel. The Gospel makes nothing of man, and everything of Christ. The Gospel comes to us on the assumption, or rather the fully demonstrated *fact*, that we are lost creatures—hopelessly, helplessly, irretrievably lost in ourselves. It comes unto us as those who are justly condemned by the holy Law of God, as those who are even now under the Divine curse, as those who are rushing headlong to eternal destruction. The Gospel tells of the amazing provision which God has made for depraved and vile sinners. It announces the exceeding riches of grace unto those who are His inveterate enemies. It proclaims a full and perfect salvation for all who are willing to receive it. It not only publishes a full pardon and deliverance from Hell, but it promises eternal life and everlasting glory to all who believe its glad tidings; and it offers these inestimable blessings freely, “without money and without price.”

The Gospel makes known how God can show mercy unto the rebellious without compromising His justice, how He can receive the ungodly without sully His holiness, how He can remit the penalty of sin without dishonouring His Law, how He can save the very chief of sinners to the praise of the glory of His grace. The Person and work of Christ supplies a full and perfect answer to each of these “hows.” God has not shown mercy at the expense of justice, for He set forth Christ “to be a propitiation (a satisfaction rendered to Divine justice) through faith in His blood” (Rom. 3:25). God has not sullied His holiness but rather has He exemplified and glorified it by refusing to spare His own dear Son (Rom. 8:32) when He bore the sins of His people. God has not slighted the Law, for it was magnified and made honourable by Immanuel’s rendering unto it a perfect and perpetual obedience in thought, word and deed. God can save the very chief of sinners unto the praise of the glory of His grace without requiring any price from them because He has received full payment of his debts in the sacrifice of Calvary, which was and is of infinite value.

Where the Gospel is applied by the supernatural power of the Spirit, beating down all opposition thereto, the mind cordially assents to its contents, the heart rejoices therein, the will responds thereto, and thus an “evangelical spirit” is born in the soul. The sinner is evangelized in the true and full sense of that word. He not only throws down the weapons of his warfare against God but he repudiates the filthy rags of his own righteousness. He has been made to see and feel himself so condemned by the Law as to know there is

no help in himself. He has been brought to realize that his soul is sick unto death and that none but the great Physician can do him any good. He now knows himself to be a pauper, utterly dependent upon Divine charity and therefore the Gospel of the grace of God is most suited to his need and most glorious good tidings unto his heart. It is as truly welcome to him as food to a starving man, as a cup of cold water would be to one who was suffering the fires of Hell.

Wherever an understanding has been Divinely enlightened, wherever a heart has been opened to receive the Gospel of God, there an “evangelical spirit” prevails. The language of such an one is, “Thou O Christ are all I want, more than all in You I find. Your righteousness prevails to justify me before God. Your holiness is my sanctification. Your blood removes my foulness. Your merits meet my unworthiness. Your power is sufficient for my weakness. Your riches supply all my need. I have heard Your voice, Lord Jesus, tell me not of ought beside. I have seen Your face, Lord Jesus, all my soul is satisfied.” Such an one has been accepted in the Beloved, accorded a standing before God which neither the Law nor Satan can challenge, and made nearer and dearer to God than are the holy angels. Tell such an one that something else is still required from him before God can regard him with approbation—that the redemption of Christ must be plussed by his own good works—and he rejects such an aspersion with the utmost abhorrence, as the Devil’s lie.

It is, however, to be pointed out that whereas all “evangelical spirit” is the opposite of a “legal” one, it is also the very reverse of a licentious one. Christ saves His people “from their sins” (Matt. 1:21): that is, from the love and dominion of them as well as from their pollution and penalty. The Gospel announces the amazing grace of God, but His grace is not exercised at the expense of righteousness, rather does it “reign through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21). The very grace which proclaims a free and full salvation without money and without price also works mightily and transformingly in its recipients, “teaching us (effectually, not theoretically) that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12). The Gospel is very far from inculcating lawlessness. When the Apostle asked, “Do we then (by preaching salvation by grace alone) make void the Law through faith?” he answered, “God forbid: yea we establish the Law” (Rom. 3:31), for the believer is “under the Law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

The more the Gospel works effectually in those who believe, the more are they conformed, both inwardly and outwardly, unto the image of Christ. And the Lord Jesus declared, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea Thy Law is within My heart” (Psa. 40:8). This, too, in their measure, is the experience and acknowledgement of each one saved by Him. Said the Apostle, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22), which was the voicing of an essential element in an “evangelical spirit.” Where the heart beats true to the Gospel, the possessor is not only delivered from legality or self-righteousness but he is also preserved from spiritual lawlessness. While no sinner is or can be saved on account of his own doings, so far from the Gospel and salvation by grace being the enemy of good works, it inculcates them: “For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10 and cf. Titus 2:14).

An “evangelical spirit,” then, is one which cleaves to the happy mean between two evil and fatal extremes: legality and lawlessness, self-righteousness and self-pleasing.

Against these two evils the Christian needs to be constantly on his guard both in doctrine and practice, for while on the one hand there is ever a tendency in him to “frustrate the grace of God” (Gal. 2:21), to “fall from grace” (Gal. 5:4), which is done whenever we bring in anything of our own as the ground of our acceptance with God. On the other hand we are ever prone to “turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4), which is done when we presumptuously give license to the flesh and follow a course of self-will on the pretext that this cannot jeopardize our eternal security in Christ. To counter the uprisings of the spirit of legality we must constantly remind ourselves that we have nothing good but what God has wrought in us, and therefore we have no cause for boasting—that we are what we are by the grace of God. To oppose the workings of licentiousness, we must continually ponder the fact that we are not our own, but “bought with a price” and that we most glorify Christ as we follow the example He has left us.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

22. *Seeking Grace*: Matthew 7:7, 8.

Verses 7 to 11 contain the 8th division of our Lord's Sermon. Every commentator we have consulted thereon regards the passage as dealing solely with the subject of *prayer*. Personally we deem such a view to be an undue narrowing of its scope. While the supplicating of God is undoubtedly the principal duty enjoined therein, it is not its only one. It seems to us that its theme is the seeking supplies of grace to enable the believer to live a spiritual and supernatural life in this world, and though such enablement is to be sought from the Throne of Grace, that does not render needless or exempt the Christian from diligently employing the other means of grace which God has appointed for the blessing of His people. Prayer must not be allowed to induce lethargy in other directions or become a lazy substitute for the putting forth of our energies in other duties. We are called upon to *watch* as well as pray, to deny self, strive against sin, take unto us the whole armour of God, and fight the good fight of faith.

What has been suggested above concerning the *scope* of our present passage will be the more apparent by viewing it in relation to its whole context. From 5:20 onwards Christ had presented a standard of moral excellence which is utterly unattainable by mere flesh and blood. He had inculcated one requirement after another which it lies not in the power of fallen human nature to meet. He had forbidden an opprobrious word, a malignant wish, an impure desire, a revengeful thought. He had enjoined the most unsparing mortification of our dearest members (5:29, 30). He had commanded the loving of our enemies, the blessing of those who curse us, the doing good unto those who hate us, and the praying for those who despitefully use and persecute us (5:44). In view of which the Christian may well exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Such demands of holiness are beyond my feeble strength: yet the Lord *has* made them—what then am I to do?

Coming nearer still to our passage we find in the opening verses of chapter 7 Christ gave two apparently contradictory commands. First, He says, "Judge not that ye be not judged": abstain from forming harsh estimates and passing censorious censures on your fellows. Second, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs": *discriminate* sharply between the clean and the unclean, that you may not be guilty of obliterating the lines which God has drawn between the righteous and the wicked. But to steer safely between such rocks as these requires not only spiritual strength but spiritual wisdom—such wisdom as the natural man possesses not. What, then, is the poor believer to do? The Lord here anticipates this difficulty and meets this perplexity. He is well aware that in our own wisdom and strength we are incapable of keeping His commands but He at once reminds us that the things which are ordinarily impossible for men can be made possible to them by God.

Divine assistance is imperative if we are to meet the Divine requirements. That Divine assistance is to be sought prayerfully, believingly, diligently and persistently, and if it is thus sought it will not be sought in vain. It was then for the obtaining of supplies of Divine grace and heavenly strength that our Lord now exhorted and encouraged His disciples. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). In the foregoing chapter Christ had touched upon the subject of prayer in a way of warning but here He refers to it as the appointed channel for obtaining supplies of grace to obey those precepts which are so contrary to flesh and blood. First He had given instructions concerning the *duty* of prayer but now He supplies

gracious encouragements for the *exercise* of it. Nevertheless it is clear from the general tenor of Scripture that every legitimate means must be employed if we are to obtain the strength and help we so much need.

“Ask, and it shall be given you.” Few texts have been more grossly perverted than this one. Many have regarded it as a sort of blank check which anybody, no matter what his state of soul or manner of walk may be, can fill in just as he pleases, and he has only to present the same before the Throne of Grace and God stands pledged to honour it. Such a travesty of the Truth would not deserve refutation were it not trumpeted about so extensively. James 4:3 expressly affirms, “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.” Such are those who seek this world first and then hope to make sure of the world to come. Such are those who beg for mercy but refuse to forsake their sins (Prov. 28:9), who seek salvation in a way of their own devising—by a more flesh-pleasing method than that of the holy Gospel—or who come in their own name in contempt of the appointed Mediator. They “ask amiss” and receive not who request what God *has not promised*, or who seek formally and hypocritically without any deep-felt need of what they ask for.

Thus our text provides the minister of the Gospel with an admirable opportunity for heeding the exhortation of the previous verse and seeing to it that in his interpretation and application he refrains from giving that which is holy unto the dogs or casting pearls before swine. “Ask, and it shall be given you,” is very far from affording cart blanche to all and sundry. It is supplicating supplies of *Divine grace* which is here in view, and moreover, there must be a *right asking* (and not an asking “amiss”) if such are to be obtained. This right asking is impossible for the unregenerate, for not only are they totally incapable of asking in faith, but to seek for Divine grace is diametrically opposed to their very nature and disposition. Grace is the antithesis of sin, a holy principle, and since the natural man is wholly in love with sin it is impossible that he should have any love for or desire after that which is radically opposed to sin. The thistle cannot bear grapes, nor can a heart at enmity with God pant after conformity to Him.

It needs, then, to be made unmistakably clear that *right seeking* after grace presupposes *right desires* for it, but the unregenerate are, in the habitual temper of their heart, strangers to all spiritual aspirations. To have genuine desires after the thing and an entire contrariety to it in the whole soul and at the same time is a direct contradiction. To that it may be rejoined, How, then, will you explain the anomaly of some worldlings having at times an apparently hearty desire after grace so that they even persuade themselves they sincerely and earnestly long for it? Easily: it is because they are ignorant of the true nature of grace, unaware that it is a holy principle, and therefore they have framed a false image of it. It is this fictitious “grace”—which makes light of sin, which grants an indulgence for the lusts of the flesh—their relish for *it* is thoroughly in accord with their corrupt nature.

Many who sit under Antinomian preaching are led to believe that God is willing to save sinners *without* their forsaking their idols, throwing down the weapons of their warfare against Him—without repentance. They know not that salvation is not only a passport to Heaven but it is first a deliverance from the love and dominion of *sin*—that the grace of God which brings salvation is a *holy* principle that effectually teaches its subjects to “*deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12). If these deluded people apprehended the true character of grace their native contrariety thereto would be no longer hid from them. Did not

not the Pharisees verily believe they loved God and revered His Law? yet they hated the Son of God, who was the express image of the Father and came into the world to honour His Law—they must therefore have held *erroneous* notions of God and His Law—as many now do of His Grace.

But if we plainly announce that no unregenerate person can lay claim to the promise of our text, will not such teaching take from the poor sinner all motive to pray unto God and do anything else? Such a question betrays either a woeful ignorance or else a declination to face the facts of the case. So long as the sinner remains in his natural condition he cares not one jot for God nor will he engage in any religious duty except for what he thinks he will gain thereby. Let such a creature have a hundred motives to pray (excruciating pain of body, the suffering of a loved one, the approach of death, or the pleadings of friends who assure him he has merely to ask God for mercy and he will receive it) and he will only serve *self* and not God at all. To tell the ungodly that such a promise as Matthew 7:7, 8 belongs to them is to throw dust into their blind eyes, hiding from them the desperateness of their plight, glossing over the solemn truth that while they are wedded to their lusts they are the objects of God's holy abhorrence and can have no access to Him.

Alas, where shall a faithful physician of souls be found today? The vast majority of those who occupy the modern pulpit, instead of using the lancet and knife of the Divine Law, please their unregenerate hearers with soothing syrup or anesthetics, preaching smooth things to them and crying, "peace, peace," when there is none. What encouragement can the thrice holy God, consistently with His honour, give to those who live solely for the pleasing of themselves? At most, this: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). The wickedness of man's heart is such as no human language can depict, and unless man sincerely repents of the same there is no hope for him. The business of God's servants is not to bestow false comfort but to slay false confidence: not to persuade those who lie under the wrath of God that they may be delivered therefrom by betaking themselves to prayer but to faithfully and honestly let their unsaved hearers know *the worst* of their case.

It is not without good reason that we find Matthew 7:6 and 7 in juxtaposition. The Saviour with His Divine omniscience foresaw the misuse which would be made of this precious promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you," and therefore He placed this emphatic warning *immediately before it*: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." Thus they are without excuse who have so sadly perverted this blessed promise of God's Word. That which needs to be pressed upon promiscuous congregations today is the very same as *Christ* proclaimed in the hearing of "the multitudes," namely, the spirituality of God's Law, the searching nature of its requirements, the breadth and depth of its holy demands as set forth in Matthew 5:17 to 7:5. Not until the hearer is humbled beneath the mighty hand of God, not until he sees how completely he has failed to meet the Divine requirements, not until he feels he is both "without excuse" and "without strength," is he a fit subject for the comfort of our text.

And now we must address ourselves to the genuine Christian, the one in whom a miracle of Divine mercy and power has been wrought, the one whose self-complacency and self-sufficiency have been shattered, the one who has been given "repentance unto life." Such an one has had his eyes opened to see that the Law of God is "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12), that though it condemns and curses him yet it is righteous and excel-

lent. Such an one has had communicated to him a love for that Law (Psa. 119:174) and therefore a longing to live in full conformity thereto. Yet such an one still finds himself utterly unable to measure up to the exalted standard set before him. Nay, he discovers to his grief there is still a principle within him which is directly opposed to the Law, that when he would do good evil is present to prevent him. He finds to his perplexity and sorrow that indwelling corruption is stronger than all his resolutions not to yield thereto, that his lusts rage more fiercely than ever, that iniquities prevail over him. He is bewildered, staggered.

It is to such an one as we have just described, and to none other, that Christ says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." You need Divine power to subdue your raging lusts. You need Divine quickening to animate your feeble graces. You need Divine wisdom to solve your perplexities. You need Divine ointment for your wounds—so address yourself to "your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 7:11). Spread before Him your needs, acquaint Him with the longings of your soul, beg Him to relieve your wants and you will not supplicate Him in vain. Ah, *this* is what genuine prayer, real prayer is, my reader. It is not merely the formal or mechanical performance of a religious exercise. It is not simply the stringing together pious expressions couched in eloquent language—rather is it looking outside of ourselves and seeking help from Above. True prayer is artless, spontaneous—the irrepressible cry of a soul in *need*. Prayer is the voicing of urgent longings of soul: it is the heart turning to the Author of those longings for the satisfying of them.

"Ask." How Divinely simple! Ask as the hungry child does for its mother's breast. Ask as the starving beggar does for a crust of bread. Ask as the lost traveler does the first one whom he meets. "Ask, and it shall be given you." How Divinely encouraging! Ask of God, for He "giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not." Ask, for He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). But "let him ask *in faith*, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1:6, 7). To "ask in faith" is to ask with confidence in God, with reliance upon His veracity, laying hold of His promise, pleading it before Him and expecting an answer of peace. To "ask in faith" is to humbly but boldly say unto the Lord, "Thou hast promised Thy child, 'Ask, and it shall be given you': I beg to remind Thee of that promise, now 'do as Thou hast said' " (2 Sam. 7:25).

But we hear more than one of our readers saying, "I *have* asked, yet alas, I have not received. Yea, my case now is worse than it was before. So far from having more grace I have less; so far from increased strength I am weaker; so far from being granted victory over my lusts I am more frequently and woefully defeated than ever." Be it so, is that proof your prayers have not been heard? You prayed for more grace, may not the answer have been given in the form of increased *light*, so that instead of your case being worse now than it was formerly you *perceive your sinfulness more clearly*? And if that is so, is it not something to be thankful for? You prayed for overcoming grace, but possibly God saw you were in far greater need of *humbling* grace and if He has granted you a measure of the latter so that you are further out of love with yourself and brought more into the dust before Him, surely that is proof your asking has not been in vain!

Yes, says the reader, that may be true and God forbid that I should despise small mercies, but surely you would not have me rest content with such a Christ-dishonouring ex-

perience? Answer, you must not look upon humility and mourning over your corruptions as “small mercies”: they are distinguishing favours which mark you as belonging to another family than the self-righteous Pharisees and self-satisfied Laodiceans. It is much to be thankful for if God hides pride from you and keeps you low before Him. And what do you mean by your “Christ-dishonouring experience”? Are you aware that there is still a spirit within you which lusts after independence and self-sufficiency? Would you, if you could, attain to some experience wherein you would feel less deeply your dire need of Christ? They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick! Christ is most honoured when we prize most highly His sacrifice, when we avail ourselves most gladly of His cleansing blood, when we come to Him for healing and strength.

But is not Christ able to impart spiritual *health* as well as bestow spiritual healing? Assuredly He is. Then is it not our privilege to ask Him for spiritual health? Certainly, yet in subordination to His sovereign pleasure, for He knows the degree of health which will be best for us. But observe the terms of our text: something more than “asking” is required of us—“seek, and ye shall find.” That word “seek” may be regarded two ways. First, as a higher degree of the former, an intensification of the “asking.” There must be an earnest and fervent asking if we are to obtain: “ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). Second, it enlarges its scope: seeking is more extensive than praying. He who sincerely longs for grace to equip for spiritual duties must leave no stone unturned. The Word must be read, studied, memorized, meditated upon. The Word must be heard if a faithful minister is accessible. The writings of godly men of the past are often a great help. “While I was musing, the fire burned.”

“Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” The thought suggested to us by this clause is that grace is not to be come at easily. It is as though the earnest asker and diligent seeker is now confronted by a closed door. Even so, says Christ, be not discouraged and dismayed: continue your quest, “knock.” There are times when it seems as though God turns away from us, hides Himself, and we have no access to Him. This is to test our sincerity, to try our earnestness, to put us to the proof as to whether we long for His grace as much as we imagine. If we do, discouragements will only serve to redouble our efforts. When the four men who bore one sick of the palsy could not come near Christ because of the crowd, they broke through the roof and let down the bed whereon the man lay, and so far from Christ being displeased with their importunity, when He “saw their faith” He said unto the sick of the palsy, “son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:4, 5). Faith refuses to be deterred and continues asking, seeking, knocking, until its requests be granted.— A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

28. In the Cave.

“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Elijah was now called upon to witness a most remarkable and awe-inspiring display of God’s power. The description which is here given of the same, though brief, is so graphic that any words of ours would only serve to blunt its forcefulness. What we desire to do is rather to ascertain the *meaning and message* of this sublime manifestation of God: its message to Elijah, to Israel, and to ourselves. O that our eyes may be anointed to discern, our heart so affected as to appreciate our thoughts controlled by the Holy Spirit and our pen directed unto the glory of the Most High and the blessing of His dear people.

In seeking to discover the spiritual significance of what the Prophet here witnessed upon the mount, we must ponder the same in connection with what has preceded it both in the history of Israel and in the experience of Elijah himself. Then we must consider it in relation to what immediately follows, for there is undoubtedly a close connection between the startling scenes depicted in verses 11 and 12 and the solemn message contained in verses 15-18, the latter serving to interpret the former. Finally we need to examine this striking incident in the light of the Analogy of Faith, the Scriptures as a whole, for one part of them serves to explain another. It is as we become better acquainted with the “ways” of God, as revealed in His Word, that we are able to enter more intelligently into the meaning of His “acts” (Psa. 103:7).

How then are we to consider this manifestation of God upon the mount with regard to Elijah himself? First, as the Lord’s dealing with him *in grace*. This should be evident from the context. There we have seen the touching response which God made to His servant’s failure. So far from forsaking him in his hour of weakness and need, the Lord had ministered most tenderly to him, exemplifying that precious promise, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him” (Psa. 103:13). And Elijah *did* fear the Lord and though his faith was for the moment eclipsed, the Lord did not turn His back upon him on that account. Sleep was given to him: an angel supplied him with food and drink: supernatural strength was communicated to his frame so that he was enabled to do without any further nourishment for forty days and nights. And when he reached the cave, Christ Himself, the eternal “Word” had stood before him in theophanic manifestation. What *high favours* were those! What proofs that we have to do with One who is “the God of all *grace*.”

To what has just been pointed out it may be said, “True but then Elijah *slighted* that grace: instead of being suitably affected thereby he remained petulant and peevish; instead of confessing his failure he attempted to justify the forsaking of his post of duty. Even so: then what? Why, does not the Lord here teach the refractory Prophet a needed lesson? Does He not appear before him in a terrifying manner for the purpose of rebuking him?” This writer does not read this incident in that way. Those who take such a view must have little experimental acquaintance with the wondrous grace of God. He is not fickle and variable as we are: He does not at one time deal with us according to His own compassionate benignity and at another treat - us according to our ill deserts. When God

begins to deal in grace with one of His elect, He *continues* dealing with him in grace, and nothing in the creature can impede the outflow of His lovingkindness.

One cannot examine the wonders which occurred here on Horeb without seeing in them an intended reference to the awful solemnities of Sinai with its “thunders and lightning” when the Lord “descended upon it in fire” and the whole mount “quaked greatly” (Exo. 19:16, 18). Yet we miss the force of the allusion in our present verses, 1 Kings 19:11-12, unless we heed carefully the words, “the LORD was *not in* the wind,” “the LORD was *not in* the earthquake,” “the Lord was *not in* the fire.” God was not dealing with Elijah on the ground of the Legal Covenant. That threefold negative is the Spirit saying to us Elijah had “not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest” (Heb. 12:18). Rather was the Prophet addressed by the “still small voice” which was plain intimation that he had “come unto mount Zion” (Heb. 12:22)—the Mount of Grace. That Jehovah should reveal Himself thus to Elijah was a mark of Divine favour, conferring upon him the same sign of distinction which He had vouchsafed unto Moses in that very place, when He showed him His glory and made all His goodness pass before him.

Second, the method which the Lord chose to take with His servant on this occasion was designed for his *instruction*. Elijah was dejected at the failure of his mission. He had been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, but what had come of all his zeal? He had prayed as probably none before him had ever prayed, yet though miracles had been wrought in answer thereto, that which lay nearest to his heart had not been attained. Ahab had been quite unaffected by what he had witnessed. The nation was not reclaimed unto God. Jezebel was as defiant as ever. Elijah appeared to be entirely alone and his utmost efforts were unavailing. The enemy still triumphed in spite of all. The Lord, therefore, sets before His servant an object lesson. By solemn exhibitions of His mighty power He impressively reminds Elijah that He is not confined to any one agent in the carrying out of His designs. The elements are at His disposal when He is pleased to employ them: a gentler method and milder agent if such be His will.

It was quite natural that Elijah should have formed the conclusion that the whole work was to be done by himself, coming as he did with all the vehemence of a mighty wind; that under God all obstacles would be swept away—idolatry abolished and the nation brought back to the worship of Jehovah. The Lord now graciously makes known unto the Prophet that He has other arrows in His quiver which He would discharge in due time. The “wind,” the “earthquake,” “the fire,” should each play their appointed part and thereby make way more distinctly and effectively for the milder ministry of the “still small voice.” Elijah was but one agent among several. “One soweth and another reapeth” (John 4:37). Elijah had performed his part and soon would he be grandly rewarded for his faithfulness. Nor had he laboured in vain—another man and not himself should enter into his labours. How gracious of the Lord to thus take His servant into His confidence!

“Surely the Lord God will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the Prophets” (Amos 3:7). This is exactly what occurred there on Horeb. By means of what we may term a panoramic parable God revealed the future unto Elijah. Herein we may discover the bearing of this remarkable incident *upon Israel*. In the immediate sequel we find the Lord bidding Elijah anoint Hazael over Syria, Jehu over Israel, and Elisha Prophet in his place, assuring him that, “it shall come to pass that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall

Elisha slay” (1 Kings 19:17). It was in the work of those men we may perceive the prophetic meaning of the solemn phenomena Elijah beheld—they were symbols of the dire calamities with which God would punish the apostate nation. Thus the strong “wind” was a figure of the work of judgment which Hazael performed on Israel, when he “set their strongholds on fire and slew their young men with the sword” (2 Kings 8:12). The “earthquake” was a picture of the revolution under Jehu, when he “utterly destroyed the house of Ahab” (2 Kings 9:7-10)—and the “fire” depicted the work of judgment completed by Elisha.

Third, the incident as a whole was designed for the *consolation* of Elijah. Terrible indeed were the judgments which would fall upon guilty Israel, yet in wrath Jehovah would remember mercy. The chosen nation would not be utterly exterminated and therefore did the Lord graciously assure His despondent servant, “Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). As the “strong wind” the “earthquake” and the “fire” were emblematic portents of the judgments which God was shortly to send upon His idolatrous people, so the “still small voice” which followed them looked forward to the *mercy* He had in store after His “strange work” had been accomplished. For we read that after Hazael had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz that “the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion unto them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet” (2 Kings 13:23). Once again we say how gracious of the Lord to make known unto Elijah “things to come” and thus acquaint him with what should be the sequel to his labours.

If we consider the remarkable occurrences at Horeb in the light of the Scriptures as a whole we shall find they were indicative and illustrative of one of the general principles in the Divine government of this world. The *order* of the Divine manifestations before Elijah was analogous to the general tenor of the Divine proceedings. Whether it is with regard to a people or an individual it is usual for the bestowment of Divine mercies to be preceded by awe-inspiring displays of God’s power and displeasure against sin. First the plagues upon Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea—and then the deliverance of the Hebrews. The majesty and might of Jehovah exhibited on Sinai and then the blessed proclamation, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness, and in keeping mercies for thousands, forgiving iniquities and transgressions and sin” (Exo. 34:6, 7). Thus will it be at the end-time: the destruction of “Babylon” will be followed by “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

Fourth, the method followed by the Lord on this occasion was meant to *furnish Elijah for further service*. The “still small voice,” speaking quietly and gently, was designed to calm and sooth his ruffled spirit. It evidenced afresh the kindness and tenderness of the Lord, who would assuage his disappointment and cheer his heart. Where the soul is reassured of his Master’s love the servant is nerved to face fresh dangers and oppositions for His sake and to tackle any task He may assign him. It was thus also He dealt with Isaiah: first abasing him with a vision of His glory, which made the Prophet conscious of his utter *sinfulness and insufficiency*, and then assuring him of the remission of his sins; and in consequence Isaiah went forward on a most thankless mission (Isa. 6:1-12). The sequel here shows the Lord’s measures were equally effective with Elijah: he received a fresh commission and obediently he discharged it.

“And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave” (1 Kings 19:13). This is very remarkable. So far as we can gather from the inspired record, Elijah stood unmoved at the varied displays of Jehovah’s power, fearful as they were to behold—surely a clear intimation that his conscience was not burdened by guilt! But when the still small voice sounded he was at once affected. The Lord addressed His servant not in an angry and austere manner but with gentleness and tenderness, to show him what a compassionate and gracious God he had to do with, and his heart was touched. The Hebrew word for “still” is the one employed in Psalm 107:29—“He maketh the storm a *calm*.” The wrapping of his face in his mantle betokened two things: his reverence of the Divine majesty and a sense of his own unworthiness—as the seraphim are represented as covering their faces in the Lord’s presence (Isa. 6:2, 3). When Abraham found himself in the presence of God he said, “I am dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). When Moses beheld Him in the burning bush he “hid his face” (Exo. 3:6).

Many and profitable are the lessons pointed out *for us* in this remarkable incident. First, from it we may perceive it is God’s way to do *the unexpected*. Were we to put it to a vote as to which they thought the more likely—for the Lord to have spoken to Elijah through the mighty wind and earthquake—or the still small voice, we suppose the great majority would say the former. And is it not much the same in our own spiritual experience? We earnestly beg Him to grant us a more definite and settled assurance of our acceptance in Christ and then look for His answer in a sort of electric shock imparted to our souls or in an extraordinary vision—when instead it is by the still small voice of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Again, we beseech the Lord that we may grow in grace, and then expect His answer in the form of more conscious enjoyment of His presence; whereas He quietly gives us to see more of the hidden depravity of our hearts. Yes, God often does the unexpected in His dealings with us.

Second, *the pre-eminence of the Word*. Reduced to a single word we may say that the varied phenomena witnessed by Elijah upon the mount was a matter of the Lord *speaking* to him. When it is said, “The Lord was not in” the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, we are to understand it was not through *them* He addressed Himself to the Prophet’s heart; rather was it by the “still small voice.” In regarding this last agent as the emblem of the Word, we find confirmation in the striking fact that the Hebrew word for “small” is the self-same one used in “a small round thing” in Exodus 16:14, and we need hardly add, the manna whereby the Lord fed Israel in the wilderness was a type of the food He has provided for our souls. Though the wondrous wisdom and potent power of God is displayed in creation, it is not through nature that God may be understood and known—but through the Word applied by His Spirit.

Third, in the phenomena of the mount we may perceive a striking illustration of the vivid *contrast* between the Law and the Gospel. The rock-rending wind, the earthquake and the fire figured the terror-producing Law (as may be seen from their presence at Sinai), but the “still small voice” was a fit emblem of “the Gospel of peace” which soothes the troubled breast. As the plow and the harrow are necessary in order to break up the hard earth and prepare it for the seed, so a sense of the majesty, holiness and wrath of God are the harbingers which prepare us to truly appreciate His grace and love. The careless must be awakened, the soul made sensible of its danger, the conscience convicted of the sinfulness of sin before there is any turning unto God and fleeing from the wrath to

come. Yet those experiences are not saving ones: they do but prepare the way as the ministry of John the Baptist fitted men to behold the Lamb of God.

Fourth, thus we may see in this incident a figure of God's ordinary manner of *dealing with souls*, for it is customary for Him to use the Law *before* the Gospel. In spite of much which is now said to the contrary this writer still believes that it is usual for the Spirit to wound before He heals—to shake the soul over Hell before He communicates a hope of Heaven—to bring the heart to despair before it is brought to Christ. Self-complacency has to be rudely shattered and the rags of self-righteousness torn off if a sense of deep need is to fill the heart. The Hebrews had to come under the whip of their masters and to be made to groan in the brick kilns before they longed to be delivered from Egypt. A man must know himself to be utterly lost before he will crave salvation. The wind and fire must do their work before we can appreciate the “joyful sound” (Psa. 89:15). Sentence of death has to be written upon us ere we turn to Christ for life.

Fifth, this is often God's method of *answering prayer*. Christians are very apt to look for God to respond unto their petitions with striking signs and spectacular wonders, and because these are not given in a marked and permanent form they conclude He heeds them not. But the presence and power of God are not to be gauged by abnormal manifestations and extraordinary visitations. The wonders of God are rarely wrought with noise and vehemence. Whose ear can detect the falling of the dew? Vegetation grows silently but none the less surely. In grace as in nature God usually works gently, softly, unperceived except by the effects produced. The greatest fidelity and devotion to God are not to be found where excitement and sensationalism hold forth. The blessing of the Lord attends the unobtrusive and persevering use of His appointed means which attracts not the attention of the vulgar and carnal.

Sixth, this scene on Horeb contains a timely *message for preachers!* How many a minister of the Gospel has become thoroughly discouraged, though with far less provocation than Elijah. They have been untiring in their labours, zealous for the Lord, faithful in preaching His Word, yet nothing comes of it. There is no response, all appears to be in vain. Even so, granted that such is the case, then what? Seek to lay hold afresh on the grand Truth that the purpose of the Lord shall not fail, and that purpose includes *tomorrow* as well as today! The Most High is not confined to any one agent. Elijah thought the whole work was to be accomplished through *his* instrumentality but was taught that he was only one factor among several. Do your duty where God has stationed you: plow up the fallow ground and sow the Seed and though there is no fruit in *your* day, who knows but what an Elisha may follow you and do the reaping.

Seventh, there is a solemn *warning here to the unsaved*. God will not be mocked with impunity. Though He is longsuffering, there is a limit to His patience. Those who improved not the day of their visitation and opportunity under the ministry of Elijah were made to feel what a terrible thing it is to flout the Divine warnings. Mercy was followed by judgment, drastic and devastating. The strongholds of Israel were overthrown and their young men slain by the sword. Is this to be the awful fate of the present generation? Is it devoted by God to destruction? It looks more and more like it. The masses are given up to a spirit of madness. The most solemn portents of the approaching storm are blatantly disregarded. The words of God's servants fall upon deaf ears. O my unsaved readers, flee to Christ without further delay ere the flood of God's wrath engulfs you!—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

2. *Its Importance.*

The theme of this present series of articles is far more than a theological dogma or sectarian tenet: it is an essential portion of that Faith once and for all delivered to the saints, concerning which we are exhorted to "contend earnestly." In it is displayed, respectively, the honour and glory of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and therefore they who repudiate this truth cast a most horrible aspersion upon the Character of the triune Jehovah. The final perseverance of the saints is one of the grand and distinctive blessings proclaimed by the Gospel—being an integral part of salvation itself—and therefore any outcry against this doctrine is an attack upon the very foundations of the believer's comfort and assurance. How can I go on my way rejoicing if there are doubts in my mind whether God will continue to deal graciously with me and complete that work which He has begun in my soul? How can I sincerely thank God for having delivered me from the wrath to come if it is quite possible I may yet be cast into Hell?

Above we have said that the honour and *glory of Jehovah* is bound up in the final perseverance of the saints: let us now proceed to amplify that assertion. God the Father predestinated His people "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29), which conformity is not fully wrought in any of them in this life, but awaits the day of Christ's appearing (1 John 3:2). Now is the Father's eternal purpose placed in jeopardy by the human will? is its fulfillment contingent upon human conduct? or, having ordained the end will He not also make infallibly effectual all means to that end? That predestination is founded upon His love: "I have loved thee (says the Father to each of His elect) with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). Nor is there any variation in His love, for God is not fickle like we are: "I am the LORD, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). Were it possible for one of God's elect to totally apostatize and finally perish it would mean the Father had purposed something which He failed to effect and that His love was thwarted.

Consider God the Son in His mediatorial character. The elect were committed unto Him as a trust by the Father: said He, "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them (to) Me" (John 17:6). In the Everlasting Covenant Christ offered to act as their Surety and to serve as their Shepherd. This involved the most stupendous task which the history of the universe records: the Son's becoming incarnate, magnifying the Divine Law by rendering to it perfect obedience, pouring out His soul unto death as a sacrifice to Divine justice, overcoming death and the grave, and ultimately presenting "faultless" before God (Jude 24) the whole of His redeemed. As the good Shepherd, He died for His sheep, and as the great Shepherd it is His office to preserve them from this present evil world. If He failed in this task—if *one* of His sheep were lost—where would be His faithfulness to His engagement? where would be the efficacy of His atonement? how could He triumphantly exclaim at the end, "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (Heb. 2:13)?

The Person of the Holy Spirit is equally concerned in this vital matter. It is not sufficiently realized by the saints that they are as definitely indebted to the third Person of the Godhead as truly as they are to the first and second Persons. The Father ordained their salvation, the Son in His mediatorial character purchased it, and the Spirit "applies" and effectuates it. It is the blessed Spirit's work to make good the Father's purpose and the Son's atonement: "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Said Christ to His disciples, "I will not leave you orphans (though I

leave this world): I will come to you” (John 14:18). That promise given on the eve of His death was made good in the gift of the Spirit. “But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send *in My name*, the same shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). Christ’s redeemed were thus entrusted to the love and care of the Spirit, and should *one* of them be lost where would be the Spirit’s sufficiency? where His power? where His faithfulness?

This, then, is no trivial doctrine we are now concerned with, for the most momentous considerations are inseparably connected with it. We are satisfied it is because of the failure of so many professing Christians to perceive not the seriousness of their assenting to the opposing dogma—the *total apostasy* of saints—that they have fallen for Satan’s ploy. If they understood more clearly *what was involved* in affirming that someone who is truly born again could fall from grace, continue in a course of sin, die impenitent and be eternally lost, they would be slower to set their seal unto that which carried such horrible implications. Nor may we regard it as a matter of indifference where such grave consequences are concerned. For *one* of the elect to perish would necessarily entail a *defeated Father*, who was balked of the realization of His purpose; a *disappointed Son*, who would never see the full travail of His soul and be satisfied; and a *disgraced Spirit*, who had failed to preserve those entrusted to His care. From such awful errors may we be delivered.

The importance of this truth further appears from *the prominent place* which is accorded it in the Holy Scriptures. Whether we turn to the Old Testament or the New it makes no difference. Whether we consult the Psalms or the Prophets, the Gospels or the Epistles we find it occupies a conspicuous position. If we were to cite every reference we should have to transcribe literally hundreds of verses. Instead, we will quote only a few of the lesser known ones. Here is one from the Pentateuch: “He loved the people, all His saints are in Thy hand” (Deut. 33:3). One from the Historical books: “He will keep the feet of His saints” (1 Sam. 2:9). One from Job: “When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold” (23:10). One from the Psalms: “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me” (138:8). One from the Proverbs: “The root of the righteous shall not be moved” (12:3, contrast Matt. 13:21). One from the Prophets: “I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:40). These are fair samples of the Divine promises throughout the Old Testament.

Observe the place given to this truth in the teaching of Christ. “Upon this Rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). “False Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if possible even the elect” (Mark 13:22)—it is not possible for Satan to fatally deceive any of the elect. “Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built a house and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the storm beat vehemently upon that house, and *could not shake it*; for it was founded upon a rock” (Luke 6:47-48). “This is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that *of all* which He hath given Me I should *lose nothing*” (John 6:39). The writings of the Apostles are full of it. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him” (James 2:5). “Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5).

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they no doubt would have *continued* with us” (1 John 2:19). “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling” (Jude 24).

The tremendous importance of this doctrine is further evidenced by the fact that it involves the very *integrity of the Scriptures*. There is no mistaking their teaching on this subject: the passages quoted above make it unmistakably plain that every section of them affirms the security of the saints. He, then, who declares the saints are insecure so long as they remain in this evil world—who insists that they may be eternally lost—yea, that some of them like king Saul and Judas have perished, repudiates the reliability of Holy Writ and signifies that the Divine promises are worthless! O my reader! weigh this well: the very *veracity of the Lord God* is concerned therein. He has promised to keep the feet of His saints, to deliver them from evil, to preserve them unto His heavenly kingdom, and “God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).

Elisha Coles the Puritan used a forcible argument from the less to the greater, the substance of which shall here be given. Since the Lord made good His word in things of a lower consideration, how much more will He in the eternal salvation of His people. If certain persons were destined by Him to eminent service *in this world* notwithstanding the greatest of difficulties and natural impossibilities which stood in the way to obstruct it, how much more certain is the accomplishment of His purpose concerning those vessels of mercy which He has ordained for *heavenly* glory! God promised Abraham that his seed should have the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7). Years passed and his wife was still barren, but a miracle was wrought and Isaac was born. Isaac married and for twenty years his wife remained childless, when in answer to prayer the Lord gave her conception (25:21). They had two children but the Lord rejected the elder, and the younger to whom the promise belonged was in daily danger of being killed by Esau (27:41), and to save his life he fled to Padanaram.

While in Padanaram Laban dealt harshly with Jacob, and when he decided to return home his father-in-law followed him with evil intentions, but the Lord interposed and warned Laban in a dream (Gen. 31:23, 24). But no sooner had Jacob escaped from Laban than Esau comes against him with four hundred men, determined to revenge his old grudge (32:6), but the Lord melted his heart in a moment and caused him to receive Jacob with affection. When Simeon and Levi so highly provoked the Canaanites there appeared to be every prospect that Jacob and his family would be exterminated (34:25), but the Lord caused such a terror to fall on the Canaanites that they touched not a single one (35:5). When a seven years' famine came on the land, threatening to consume them, by a strange providence the Lord provided for them in Egypt. There, later, Pharaoh sought their destruction; but in vain. By His mighty power Jehovah brought them forth from the house of bondage, opened a way through the Red Sea, conducted them across the wilderness and brought them into Canaan. Shall He do less for the spiritual seed of Abraham to whom He has promised the *heavenly* Canaan for an everlasting heritage?

Joseph was one whom the Lord would honour, and in several dreams intimated he should be exalted to a position of dignity and pre-eminence (Gen. 37). Because of that his brethren hated him and were determined to frustrate those predictions and slay him (v. 18). And how shall Joseph escape? for they are ten to one and he the least. In due course

they cast him into a pit where it seemed likely he must perish; but in the good Providence of God some Midianites passed that way ere any wild beast had found him. He is delivered into their hands and they bring him to Egypt and sell him to the captain of Pharaoh's guard—a man not at all likely to show kindness to him. But the Lord is pleased to give Joseph favour in his master's eyes (39:3, 4), yet if Joseph's hope now rose, how quickly were they disappointed. Through the lies of his mistress he was cast into prison where he spent not a few days but many years. What prospect now of preferment? Nevertheless the counsel of the Lord was made good and Joseph became lord over Egypt!

God promised the kingdom of Israel unto David and while yet a youth he was anointed to it (1 Sam. 16:13). What! notwithstanding all interventions? Yes, for the Lord had said it and shall He not do it? Therefore if Saul cast a javelin at him, unsuspected, to nail him to the wall, a sharpness of eye and agility of body shall be given David to discern and avoid it (18:11). If Saul determined evil against him, Jonathan is moved to inform him (19:7). If David is in a city that will betray him and no friend there to acquaint him of his peril, the Lord Himself is his informer and sends him out (23:12). If Saul's army encompasses him about and no way to escape is left, the Philistines invade Saul's land and the king turns away to meet them (23:26, 27). Though there were none on earth to deliver, "He (said David) shall send from Heaven and save me" (Psa. 57:3). Shortly after, Saul was slain and David came to the throne!

"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, *Josiah* by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings 13:1, 2). Most remarkable was this prophecy. The kingdom of Judah had been despised and deserted by the ten tribes, yet a day will come when the house of David should so recover its power that a member of it would demolish that altar. Nothing seems more contingent and arbitrary than the giving of names to persons, yet here the name of this man is foretold centuries before his birth, and in due time he *was* called Josiah. During the interval of three hundred and fifty years between this prediction and its fulfillment (2 Kings 23:15, 16) things transpired which *seemed* to make its accomplishment impossible. Athaliah determined to destroy all the royal seed of David, but Joash is stolen from the rest and preserved (2 Kings 11:2). Hezekiah falls sick unto death, but fifteen years is added to his life so that Manasseh, who must be Josiah's grandfather, would be born (20:6, 21).

Paul was a chosen vessel, appointed to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15) and at last to bear witness of Him at Rome (23:11). This must be done although bonds, imprisonment and death itself do attend him in every place. If, therefore they lie in wait for him at Damascus and watch the gates night and day to kill him, he shall be let down by the wall in a basket and so escape them (Acts 9:24, 25). If all Jerusalem be in an uproar to kill him, the chief captain shall come in with an army and rescue him (21:31, 32) though no friend to Paul nor to his cause. If more than forty men had bound themselves with an oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed Paul, his kinsmen shall hear of it, and by his means the chief captain shall be his friend again and grant him a sufficient convoy (23:14-23) . . . not his being once stoned, nor his thrice suffering

shipwreck, nor anything else, shall make void the purpose of God for his bearing witness of Christ at Rome” (Elisha Coles).

Now my reader, *why*, think you, are such instances as the above recorded in the sacred Scriptures? Is it not for our instruction and consolation? Is it not to assure us that the promises of God are unimpeachable, that His counsel *shall stand*, that once the word has gone forth from His mouth all earth and Hell combined is powerless to negate it? If the Lord was so exact in carrying out His word in these *lesser things*, which related only to time and earth, executing His purpose despite all outward oppositions, working miracles in order to accomplish His pleasure—how much more will He be punctilious in securing the *eternal welfare* of those whom He has appointed to Heavenly glory! If He bore His people of old “upon eagles wings” (Exo. 19:4), above the reach of danger; if He kept them as “the apple of His eye” (Deut. 32:10)—with all possible care and tenderness—till He brought them to Himself, think you that He will now do less for any for whom Christ died?

One of the outstanding *glories of the Gospel* is its promise of eternal security to all who truly believe it. The Gospel presents no third-rate Physician who is competent to treat only the milder cases but One who heals “all manner of sickness,” who is capable of curing the most desperate cases. It proclaims no feeble Redeemer, but One who is “mighty to save”—though the world, the flesh and the Devil combine against Him. He cannot be frustrated. He who triumphed over the grave cannot be thwarted by any feebleness or fickleness in His people. “He is able (which would not be true if their unwillingness could thwart Him) to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him” (Heb. 7:25). Those whom He pardons He preserves. Therefore each one who trusts in Him, though conscious of his own weakness and wickedness, may confidently exclaim, “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to *keep* that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

The importance of this truth appears clearly if we *suppose the opposite*. Assume that those who flee to Christ for refuge should finally end in the regions of Hell: then what? Why, to what purpose would be the proclamation of a Gospel which announced “so-great salvation” only for its participants to be eventually disappointed?—it would be no better than a beautiful mirage seen by parched travelers in the desert—presenting to their view a life-giving stream, only to mock those who sought it. Why, to what purpose did Christ offer Himself as a sacrifice to God if His blood avails not for those who trust in it? Why, to what purpose is the Holy Spirit given to God’s children if He is unable to subdue the flesh in them and overcome their proclivities to wander? To what purpose is the Divine gift of faith if it fails its possessor in the ultimate outcome? If the final perseverance of the saints be a delusion, then one must close his Bible and sit down in despair.—A. W. P.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

The solemn truth which we are here considering is no invention of the Church in the dark ages of ignorance and superstition but is a revelation of Holy Scripture which gives light to all who receive it by faith. The Author of eternal punishment is not the Devil acting in the desperation of his malignity but the Lord God in the exercise of His *vindictory justice*. The One who made and sustains us and who shall yet judge us according to our deeds has an infinite abhorrence of sin and has evidenced the same by passing sentence of infinite severity upon it, which sentence will in due course be enacted upon every soul which has not fled to Christ for refuge. God has not left His enemies in ignorance of the indescribably awful doom awaiting them: He has in His Word solemnly and plainly announced, again and again, the inexorable retribution which shall overtake those who spurn His authority, trample upon His laws, and mock His ambassadors. He has placed within themselves a monitor which assures them that “they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32).

Vindictory justice in the Deity has nothing in its nature inconsistent with His infinite goodness, as His infinite goodness has nothing in its nature inconsistent with His vindictory justice—for all the Divine perfections are harmonious, blending together as do the varied colours in the rainbow. It is generally lost sight of that the very love of God is “a consuming fire” *with respect to sin*. If the more holy a man becomes the more he abhors evil, then the greater his love for virtue the stronger his hatred of vice. How much more so must this be true of Him who is the Holy One. In His pure sight sin is an infinitely odious, hateful, ill-deserving thing. Therefore as He announced, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). The malediction of the Most High rests upon every unpardoned transgressor of His Law. When a wise and righteous monarch puts a traitor to death, it is not because he takes pleasure in the destruction of his subjects but because he delights in the honour of his crown and the good of his kingdom.

The vindictory justice of God was eminently displayed at the Cross. The incarnate Son who never did any wrong and in whose mouth was no guile became the Surety of His guilty people and God dealt with Him accordingly. The sins of the unjust were laid upon the Just and therefore did Divine justice exact full satisfaction from Him. God “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up” (Rom. 8:32) unto a penal and painful death. “Awake O sword (He cried) against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of Hosts, smite the Shepherd” (Zech. 13:7). The awful wages of sin must be paid Him to the fullest—the righteous requirements of the Law shall not be abated one iota and therefore Christ was “made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “It pleased the LORD to bruise Him,” He “put Him to grief” when He made “His soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10). “All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me,” cried the Sin-bearer as the storm of God’s judgment burst upon Him. “Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me” (Psa. 88:7), Christ exclaimed.

II. Its Design

In creation, in redemption, and in the destruction of the wicked, God has one grand end in view—*His own glory*. Whatever subordinate ends may be accomplished by the punishing of the lost, the principal aim which God has in view is the manifesting and magnifying of His own perfections. Yet it is only as we perceive the origin and true na-

ture of the Divine government that this will be evident to us. Alas, the view which obtains almost universally in Christendom today is that the primary design of the Divine government is the good of its subjects, which is to confuse the ultimate end with a subordinate advantage. It is true that the creature can only be really happy while rendering full obedience to the Divine Law but so far from that proving the Law was established because of its tendency to promote the felicity of its subjects, it merely makes plain those benevolent tendencies because the subject was adapted to the Law. The government of God was not adjusted to the nature and benefit of man, rather was man constituted with reference to it

To make the *creature* an end to the Creator and not the *Creator* an end to the creature is to turn things upside down, making that supreme which is subordinate and that subordinate which is truly supreme. The happiness of the creature was not the end which God designed in the promulgating of His Law—that was contemplated as an *effect*—a subordinate and incidental effect which would certainly follow from the accomplishment of the nobler purpose which actuated the Lawgiver. No, the true end of the Divine government, as in all the institutions of the Most High, must be sought not in the good of the creature, however much that may be promoted, but in the *glory of God*. That is the only object worthy of the Almighty, for it includes in itself all that is exalted in excellence, illustrious in truth, sublime in holiness. Because God is independent and self-sufficient, it is impossible that His manifold works should proceed from any other motive but the counsel of His own will. How blessed that this is so when we are assured it is the will of Him who is possessed of infinite perfections and unchangeable blessedness!

Why was God pleased to go forth into acts of creation? Was it not to reveal Himself, to declare what He is, to make known the attributes of His being, to manifest His glory by inscribing His character upon the works of His hand? When He made man was it not in His own image and likeness? Why did He give to man His Law? As a matter of expediency?—perish the thought! Was it not rather to make known the fact that to those creatures whom He has endowed with intelligence and moral accountability He sustains the relationship of *Ruler*? Through His Law a faithful and permanent exhibition is made of the eternal principles of rectitude and holiness which belong to the essence of the Godhead. Why did the Most High permit the entrance of sin into His domains? Must it not have been because its presence afforded more occasion for the *display of His perfections* than had its absence?—the wonders and glories of redemption can only shine forth as evil supplies the dark background.

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever, Amen” (Rom. 11:36) is a Divine summary of all the institutions and achievements of Jehovah. “Of Him”—they are as their originating Cause: “Through Him”—they are as their Director and Sustainer. “To Him”—to His honour and glory they necessarily tend as their supreme End. Nor is the doom of the damned any exception. The government of God is founded in His right to exact obedience from His creatures and His Law reveals the requirements of His holy will. The punishment of those who transgress it is clearly revealed—“He will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo. 34:7)—is the authority of the Ruler, the majesty of His Law, the way He regards disobedience, the manifestation of His detestation of sin and His satisfaction unto His justice. In the everlasting fires of Hell will be displayed the inextinguishable hatred of God to all iniquity.

It is because sin has blinded men's judgment that they do not perceive the glory of God is as truly evidenced in Hell by the damnation of the lost as it is in Heaven by the salvation of the redeemed. If the salvation of the latter be "to the praise of the glory of His grace," the damnation of the wicked is equally to the praise of the honour of His holiness and justice. The fact is that the unregenerate are concerned only about their own private and personal interests, having no regard to the honour of God. But once a sinner is renewed by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, He begins to see (though as "through a glass darkly") the beauty of vindicatory justice. He is able to discern that "the ministration of *death*, written and engraven in stones, was *glorious*" (2 Cor. 3:7). As he is convicted of his sinfulness, he perceives not only that eternal punishment is his just due but that God had been honourable and glorious had he been made to suffer the due reward of his iniquities in the everlasting burnings of Hell.

But it is not only through an experimental acquaintance with Sinai that the believer discovers the glory of God's punitive justice—it is also and supremely at *Calvary* that his eyes are opened to see the loveliness of that Divine perfection. As faith beholds the spotless Lamb bearing *his* sins, it also beholds the excellence of Divine justice in smiting the Lamb. Filled with horror and anguish at the multitude and heinousness of his crimes, overwhelmed with wonderment that the Just should be willing to take the place of the unjust, through tear-dimmed eyes he perceives the grandeur of that justice which exacted full satisfaction from the Vicarious One. There at Calvary the eyes of faith perceive that "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa. 85:10). Though the preaching of Christ crucified is to the self-righteous Jews a stumblingblock and to the philosophic Greek foolishness, the *believer* glories in the Cross, for he sees therein the supreme display of all the Divine perfections!

Illumined from on high the believer perceives the evicting of the sinning angels out of Heaven down to eternal darkness and despair, the turning of our first parents out of Paradise and sentencing them and all their posterity to death and the final sentence passed upon the apostate at the day of judgment as so many glorious displays of the Divine character, punishing sin according to its deserts. It was such an illumined spirit which moved Moses to say—as he beheld Pharaoh and his hosts (types of finally impenitent sinners) dead upon the sea shore—"I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously . . . Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy . . . Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods (or "mighty ones"), who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" (Exo. 15:1, 6, 11). In the execution of His vindicatory justice Jehovah appeared *most excellent* in the eyes of His servant.

God will receive infinitely more honour from the judgment which He will finally execute upon His enemies than He has received dishonour from all their rebellions. Their revolt was, comparatively, for a moment, but the penal satisfaction He shall exact will last through the endless ages of eternity. When mystical Babylon shall sink like a millstone into the sea under the vengeance of the Almighty and many shall be cast into Hell at that moment, there shall be heard "a great voice of much people in Heaven, saying, Alleluia, salvation and glory, and honour and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are His judgments, for He hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia; And her smoke rose up forever and ever" (Rev. 19:1-3).

Because the vindicatory justice of God is so excellent a Divine perfection it was a becoming and glorious thing in God to “bruise Him and put His soul to grief” who had espoused the cause of His elect and appeared as their Representative, even though He were His own Son—and for the same reason it was a becoming and glorious thing in the incarnate Son to say, “Thy will be done.” And since vindicatory justice is a blessed and glorious perfection in God, He is altogether lovely—there is *no* blemish in His character. If it were otherwise it would be impossible to conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ making such a glorious appearance as He will at the Day of Judgment—rather would He be draped in sackcloth. In “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5), He whose meat it is to honour the Father shall without the least reluctance pronounce the final sentence on the wicked; yea it will give Him ineffable delight to put an end to the controversy which has existed between God and His rebellious subjects.

III. Its Nature.

Under this head we do not propose to examine the constituent elements which will comprise the retribution visited upon the wicked: rather would we take note of its intrinsic character. From what has been said under the previous divisions there will be the less need for us to dwell upon this aspect of our subject at much length, yet we cannot ignore it entirely because it is at this very point that enemies of this truth are most accustomed to introduce their errors. Romanists are not alone in believing that the fires of “purgatory” have a purifying effect upon the souls of those who enter “limbo”: the great majority of Universalists contend that the final punishment meted out upon unbelievers is disciplinary in its character, that the Lake of Fire so far from being the ultimate Penitentiary of the universe is a grand Reformatory, and that after a season therein its inmates will emerge as purged of their depravity and fit to take their place among the citizens of Heaven

It should be sufficient refutation of such an opium dream to point out that there is not a single verse in all the Scriptures which substantiates it. There are many, many verses which speak of the wicked being cast into Hell but there is not one which declares that any shall escape therefrom, or that after serving a term therein (be that term a brief or lengthy one) any shall come forth fitted to dwell with God’s people. Not only is there nothing in the Word of God which warrants us to entertain any hope for those who die in their sins but on the contrary there is much which excludes, which utterly forbids, such a hope. The very nature of the punishment inflicted upon the finally impenitent cuts away all ground from under the feet of “Universalists,” for the intrinsic character of it is *retributive* and not educative: the sentence passed upon the lost is a *penal* and *not a remedial* one.

The nature of God’s punishment upon sin appears with unmistakable plainness at Calvary. There we behold One who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners” dying a criminal’s death and what is infinitely stranger, suffering not only at the hands of men but of God, too. The Psalmist declared, “I have never seen the righteous forsaken” (37:25), but here is the Righteous One Himself forsaken of Heaven and earth alike! What is the explanation of this mystery? Why, the Righteous One had voluntarily taken the place of the unrighteous. The sentence which stood over the head of God’s elect was “cursed are the guilty” and out of unfathomable love Christ interposed saying, Let that curse fall *on Me*. The elect of God were “by nature the children of wrath, even as

others" (Eph. 2:3), but Divine grace provided a deliverance for them from that wrath: not by making light of their sins, not by abolishing the penalty of His Law, but by admitting a Surety to take their place, assume their liabilities and being dealt with accordingly.

That is why Christ's perfect obedience was followed by such terrible punishment: fulfilling the requirements of the Law's precepts He must also endure its penalty. Being charged with His Church's guilt, He receives the wages which were due her. The justice which pursued God's sinful people smote their Substitute. Christ had presented Himself before the Divine tribunal on their behalf and God was avenged by Him for their crimes, wounding Him for *their* transgressions and bruising Him for *their* iniquities. The Saviour offered Himself unto God as a satisfaction for their wrongs and gave Himself a ransom for their debts. The sufferings of Christ were punitive and propitiatory. The very *mode* of His death demonstrated the *penal nature* of it. Under the Mosaic law death by hanging on a tree was reserved for the greatest of criminals and Christ's execution on the Tree (1 Peter 2:24) was the public testimony that God's curse rested on Him (Gal. 3:13), that He endured the *wrath* of Jehovah! The sufferings which the Redeemer experienced were a *judicial* infliction, imposed upon Him by a sin-hating God.

It is not out of *love* to them that the wicked will be cast into Hell, as being designed for their ultimate happiness but rather that in them God means to "show His *wrath* and make His power known" as their being "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The righteous are considered as "wheat" but the wicked are likened unto "tares" and "chaff" and when it is said, "but the chaff will He burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17), it is certainly not for their refining or purifying. The "damnation of Hell" (Matt. 23:33) and being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9) are expressions very far from connoting a *process* of remedial discipline. "They that perish" (1 Cor. 1:18) and "which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Tim. 6:9) is language the very opposite of conveying the idea that the portion awaiting those who die in their sins is nothing worse than a means for their reformation. The "second death" (Rev. 21:8) closes the door of hope upon all who experience it.

It has been rightly pointed out that "Even in human governments, which contemplate the injury rather than the wickedness of actions, penal laws cannot be sustained upon the sole basis of expedience. Nothing can be punished as harmful which is not felt to be vicious" (J. H. Thornwell). That is true and it is both an instructive and solemn task to study history in the light of that fact, particularly the marked change for the worse during the last fifty years by those termed "Christian nations." Where the blessing of God rests on a people, side by side with His gracious power being exerted in the churches He quickens the public conscience so that crime is made odious in their sight and their moral instinct demands that it should be punished severely. Providence so orders things that self-interests and the good of the State make a majority feel that if evil is to be suppressed evil-doers must be dealt with a firm hand and thus God's disapprobation of sin is reflected in the conscience of society.

Consequently, when the penal nature of Divine punishment is plainly and faithfully proclaimed, God's abhorrence of sin is held up to public view, and not only does this produce a salutary effect upon those who receive such teaching, but they in turn become the "salt" of society—staying the unregenerate carcass from utter corruption. Conversely, the disappearance of the doctrine of eternal punishment has had the most disastrous consequences upon the pew and the masses outside. Necessarily so—for when the Spirit is

quenched in the churches His restraining hand is removed from the world, the fruits of which quickly become apparent. Conscience goes to sleep, moral sentiment is dulled, horror at evil-doing wanes. Judges are fearful of imposing adequate sentences lest they be regarded as heartless tyrants. Government becomes more and more lax, for the leaders know the masses will no longer tolerate stern measures and so expediency rather than moral principle shapes their policy. The outcome must be the complete breakdown of law and order unless God is pleased to intervene, either in desolating judgment or restoring mercy.—A.W.P.

MINISTERIAL COUNSEL.

I am sorry to find you complaining of the state of religion among you. Infidelity abounds and Christians grow cold and lukewarm, sufficient causes of lamentation these; yet both ministers and private Christians have reason to be ashamed of their frequent neglect of those important duties a serious and regular discharge of which has a tendency to revive the power of religion. Though I am fully sensible nothing will do without the presence of the Spirit of God, yet so far as we live in the neglect of any means, so far we are certainly culpable. The great defect of ministers in the present day, I apprehend, is *impertinent conversation*, and not labouring *in private* to impress upon the minds of their hearers a sense of what is delivered in public. If our visits were more religious we might find our labours more owned. When we are in Christian company, where we may use the greatest freedom, how backward to a serious enlivening conversation! And we can spend, perhaps, a whole evening among our less religious hearers and not drop a single word that savours of the real power of godliness. I speak too much by experience, having often lost the disposition to converse about the mind of God, by impertinent chat, etc.

It is a difficult matter to retain a serious temper and inclination to interject with indifferent subjects serious and suitable reflections; we are either ashamed or afraid to be speaking for God, or else our inclination is wanting, or some trifling excuse or other keeps us from the discharge of our duty. I am often convinced of my neglect, and promise to strive against it; but I am soon overcome with fear, or filled with that shameful modesty which is a great hindrance to usefulness. It is certainly a minister's duty to preach in private, and to use plainness and faithfulness. When, instead of enforcing in private what we preach in public we readily join in impertinent talk, unrenewed persons are hardened in their impenitency, and if they had any convictions upon this they presume to take encouragement either to think well of their state, or to think there is nothing in religion, by which means our public performances are despised, or looked upon as a mere form. It is necessary that we use plainness with sinners *in private* (as well as publicly admonish them), and talk about their souls in the most serious and affectionate manner if we would be successful.

Infidelity appears more and more barefaced; it requires courage and resolution now to confess Christ before men: things cannot continue long in the present posture, but either a reformation or some sore judgment—God grant it may be the former! One minister to another—1751

