

Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 6**June, 1940****GODLY SORROW.**

It is by carefully noting the contrasts pointed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures that we learn to distinguish between things that radically differ. Sometimes these contrasts are implied by a qualifying term, at other times they are more expressly stated. Thus we read of “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), a disinterested faith, that springs from a spiritual affection, which is in contrast from a self-seeking faith that proceeds from the flesh. Romans 5:5 tells of a hope that “maketh not ashamed,” which is the opposite of the hypocrite’s hope that “shall perish” (Job 8:13). Another discriminating expression is “love unfeigned” (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Peter 1:22), which denotes there is a fictitious love, such as was displayed by Judas when he betrayed the Saviour with a kiss. In like manner the Apostle speaks of the Corinthian saints being “made sorry after a godly manner” (2 Cor. 7:9), which suggests there is a mourning over sin that has its roots in nothing higher than mere nature.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Here the contrast implied in the former verse is definitely stated, “godly sorrow” being placed over against the “sorrow of the world.” Before we consider the latter, let us offer a few more remarks upon the former. Last month we pointed out that this “godly sorrow” is such an one as is required by the thrice holy God, which He produces, and which leads the soul to Him. Godly sorrow, then, is the badge of all the heirs of Heaven, and God Himself produces it in the hearts of His people. It needs to be pointed out that He uses means in bringing it to pass—means suited to employ with moral agents, for so far from treating with us as stocks and stones, He ever draws with the “cords of a man” (Hosea 11:4).

First, “godly sorrow” issues from a broken and contrite heart, which is something that no man possesses by nature. On the contrary, the heart of the unregenerate is like “the nether millstone.” A miracle of grace has to be wrought before “a heart of flesh” is imparted. This is accomplished by means of the Word, under the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit. “Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). That speaks of an humbling and painful experience—the travail preceding the birth. Every genuine conversion is one in which the Word is received “in much affliction” (1 Thess. 1:6). That “affliction” is caused by the Truth enabling the soul to view sin as God sees it—its true nature, its heinousness, its infinite ill-desert. As sin is viewed in God’s light, the soul is overwhelmed with sorrow and shame for having offended against the Divine Majesty: “against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned” (Psa. 51:4). An illustration of this is found in Acts 2: under the faithful preaching of Peter, applied by the power of the Spirit, his hearers were “pricked in their heart” and said “what shall we do?” (v. 37).

Second, “godly sorrow” issues from spiritual considerations. As the Spirit applies the Truth to the conscience and understanding, the soul is brought under the power of due apprehensions of God’s perfections, and of his relation to Him. Horror and grief fill the heart when there is the recognition that a gracious God has been offended, a righteous Law violated, a precious Christ dishonoured, the Holy Spirit grieved. This it is which overwhelms the soul with shame and bows it into the dust. This it is which causes the renewed to be “pricked in their heart”—the realization that they have displeased Him whose favour they account more than life. Therefore when it is

said, “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4), it means not only that it is His gracious operations that produce the repentance, but also that it is the heart’s piercing consciousness of having sinned against *such goodness* that results in a radical reformation of our ways: David and Manasseh, Peter and Paul are examples of those possessed of godly sorrow.

Third, “godly sorrow” issues from an evangelical faith. It proceeds from faith as the stream from the fountain, as the branch from the root. Proof of this is found in “they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son” (Zech. 12:10). All gracious mourning proceeds from evangelical repentance, from believing. Nothing breaks the heart of a sinner like trustful looking to the Cross. The tears of godly sorrow ever drop from the eyes of faith. The more we are enabled to look by faith upon a pierced Christ, the more shall we mourn over our sins for having nailed Him to the tree. No one can stand under the shinings of dying Love with a frozen heart. Well did Luther ask, “What are all the palaces of the world to a contrite heart?”: in the former reside the princes of the earth, in the latter dwells the Prince of peace.

This spiritual mourning for sin is evidenced by its product: “godly sorrow *worketh repentance* to salvation.” In this verse “repentance” signifies reformation or walking in newness of life. Godly sorrow humbles the mind, meekens the heart, bends the will, causing the soul to turn from sin with horror and hatred thereof unto God. Unlawful imaginations and wrongful actions are unsparingly judged in the light of God’s countenance, and there is a consequent turning from the paths of folly to walk in the ways of righteousness. Thus the outcome is conversion in the case of an alien sinner, restoration for a wandering saint. “Godly sorrow” is not only one that is concerned for the Divine glory and is grieved where God is dishonoured, but it is also one which has a dependence upon His mercy, counting upon His pardoning grace, and therefore does it humbly but trustfully plead such a promise as, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” This last clause “not to be repented of” tells of the durability of that which issues from this spiritual mourning, and as no effect can be greater than its cause it announces the *lastingness* of “godly sorrow.” It is a permanent grace. So long as a real Christian continues sinning he cannot but continue grieving: “my sin is ever before me” (Psa. 51:3) must be the language of one with a quickened conscience. Not until he reaches Heaven shall all tears be removed from the saint’s eyes. Nor does any believer ever regret repenting, no matter what anguish of soul may occasion and accompany it, for it is a turning from sin—the cause of all disquietude—to our true Resting-place. The sorrow of a worldling is of short duration, but the streams of spiritual contrition last as long as sin indwells the believer.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

15. *The Giving of Alms*: Matthew 6:1-4.

We now enter upon the fourth division of our Lord's Sermon, a section which includes the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, the general subject of which is the performing of good works so as to secure the approbation of God. As we shall see, Christ here takes up quite a different aspect of Truth, yet is it one which is closely related to what had formerly occupied His attention. There He had made it very evident that He required more from His followers than what the religion of the scribes and Pharisees produced (Matt. 5:20, 47). Here He insists that a far higher *quality* is also absolutely necessary. There He had warned His hearers against the erroneous doctrines of the Jewish teachers, here He cautions them against their evil practices, particularly the sins of hypocrisy and worldly-mindedness.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:1). There is no doubt whatever in our own mind that, in this instance, the rendering of the Revised Version is to be preferred: "Take heed that ye do not your *righteousness* before men to be seen of them," though the R. V. rightly uses "alms" in verse 2. This first verse enunciates a general principle in reference to moral and spiritual duties, which in the succeeding verses is illustrated, amplified, and enforced in the three particular duties of alms, prayer and fasting—it is *acts* of righteousness which is in view. Thus it is a case where an abstract noun is given a concrete sense: it is similarly used in Matthew 3:15 and 5:20: in all three passages it has the force of "righteousnesses" or "good works."

In verses 2-4 the general principle laid down in the opening sentence is applied manward, Godward, and selfward, and the three duties specified have to do with our estates, our souls, and our bodies. Those three good works of alms, prayer and fasting have occupied a conspicuous place in all the leading religious systems, and have been almost universally regarded as the chief means of obtaining salvation and the clearest proofs of righteousness and sanctity. In their most serious moments, all, except the most abandoned, have been willing to practice some form and degree of self-denial, or perform acts of devotion, in the hope that they might thereby appease the great God whose wrath they feared.

In the teachings of the Koran, prayer, fasting and alms are the chief duties required from the Mohammedan. Prayer, it is said, will carry a man half-way to Paradise, fasting will bring him to the gates, and alms will give him entrance. The great prominence which Romanism assigns to alms-giving especially when the alms are bestowed upon herself—to the senseless repetition of prayers, and to bodily mortification, is too well known to need any enlargement upon. Similar ideas obtain among other religions, especially in Buddhism-Lamaism with its prayer-wheels being a case in point. But in our present passage Christ shows us that, as mere formal works, these religious acts are worthless in the sight of God.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:1). It ought to be apparent that our Lord is not here rephending the giving of alms as such, but rather that He is condemning that ostentatious bestowment of charity which is done for the purpose of self-advertisement. As a matter of fact this particular admonition of the Saviour's takes it for granted that His disciples were in the habit of relieving the indigent, and this notwithstanding that most of them had to labour for their own daily bread. That against which Christ warned was the giving of unnecessary publicity in

the discharge of this duty, and the making the praise of men our ultimate object therein. Most flagrantly did the Pharisees err at this very point. Edersheim gives the following quotation as a specimen, "He that says, I give this 'sela' that my sons may live, and that I may merit the world to come, behold, this is the perfect righteousness."

To show pity unto the afflicted is but common humanity. It is a great mistake to suppose that the exercise of beneficence is something peculiar to this Christian era. Under the Legal economy God commanded His people, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto them, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deut. 15:7, 8). "And if thy brother be waxen poor and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner, that he may live with thee" (Lev. 25:35). Job declared, "I was a father to the poor" (29:16). Said the Psalmist, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (41:1).

"He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Prov. 14:21)—there was the fullest room for the exercise of mercy under the Mosaic dispensation. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17): yes, for the poor, equally with the rich, are His creatures, and the Lord will be no man's debtor. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13): we need hardly say that the principle of this verse is still in operation. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack, but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Prov. 28:27). At a time of great spiritual declension in Israel, Jehovah brought against them the following charges, "They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes . . . For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right" (Amos 2:6 and 5:12).

It is therefore a most un-Christian attitude to argue, We have enough to do to provide for our own families: it is for the rich and not for the labouring people to give alms. If the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts we shall feel for the afflicted, and according to our ability shall be ready to relieve the needy, especially such as belong to the Household of Faith; yea, if a situation requires it, shall gladly deny ourselves comforts so as to do more for those in want. And let us not overlook the fact that Christ here designates almsgiving as "righteousness." The Apostle struck the same note when he pressed Psalm 112:9 on his hearers: "As it is written, he hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever" (2 Cor. 9:9). Those who refuse to give unto the poor are guilty of a gross injustice, for inasmuch as they are but stewards over what they possess, they rob the needy of their due.

Thus by making alms an essential branch of practical righteousness our Lord teaches us that the succouring of the poor is not a work of freedom, left to our own choice, but something which is enjoined upon us by Divine commandment. So far from the matter of providing for the needy being left to our own option, it is one of bare justice, and failure therein is a grievous breach both of the Law of God and of nature. But the giving of alms to the poor is not only an act of righteousness, it is also the exercise of kindness. The Greek word which is here rendered "alms" is derived from a root which signifies to have compassion or to be merciful. This takes us behind

the act itself to the spirit which prompts it: it is not the mere bestowment of goods or money which constitutes "alms," but the merciful and pitiful heart of the giver.

From what has just been pointed out we may also discover who are the ones entitled to be relieved—the kind of persons whom we may rightfully bestow alms upon, for we are not to act blindly in this matter. It is those who are in such a condition as to really draw out our pity: such as orphans and elderly widows, the maimed, the sick, and the blind. If this principle be duly heeded, we shall be guarded against indiscriminate giving, which often does a great deal more harm than good—encouraging idleness and intemperance. Obviously, healthy and robust beggars who would trade upon the generosity of others are not entitled to receive alms: "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Thus, in abetting the indolent we are partners with those who defy Divine authority.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." This admonition is for the avoidance of an unlawful manner of giving alms, for even a good deed may be done in an ill way. Alas, so very deceitful and desperately wicked are our hearts that our most beneficent actions may proceed from corrupt desires and thereby be rendered not only void, but evil in the sight of Him with whom we have to do. Christ's "take heed" here intimates we are in great danger of erring at this very point. Acts of charity are specially offensive in the sight of our gracious God when they are performed from a desire to procure for ourselves a reputation of sanctity or generosity among our fellows. Alas, how much of this obnoxious pride, this vaunting of charity is there today both in the religious world and the secular!

That against which Christ here warns His disciples is the secret pride of their hearts. This pride is twofold: of the mind and will and of the affections. Pride of mind is a corrupt disposition whereby a man thinks more highly of himself than he ought to do: this was the sin of the Pharisees and of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:16). This conceit is most dangerous, especially in the matter of saving grace, for it has caused multitudes to deceive themselves by imagining they had been born again when in fact they were dead in trespasses and sins, and moving real Christians to imagine they possess more grace than they actually do. Pride of will is an inward affection which makes a man discontented with the estate in which God has placed him, leading him to hanker after a better: this was the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:5, 6).

Now from these corrupt principles of pride of mind and pride of will issue that exercise or practice of pride in a man's life whereby he is determined to do whatever he can which will promote his own praise and glory. Such pride is not something which is peculiar to a few people only, but is found in every man by nature—the Lord Jesus alone excepted. And where this pride is not mortified and is not held in leash by God, it is so strong that it will not be crossed at any price, for rather than have his proud will thwarted, a person will commit any sin: as Pharaoh when he asked, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?" (Exo. 5:2); as Absalom, who was responsible for the banishing of his father from his own kingdom; and as Ahithophel, who went and hanged himself when his counsel was rejected. It was just such pride as this which occasioned the fall of Satan himself (Isa. 14:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:6).

Therefore, "take heed," says Christ: take every possible precaution to guard against this sin. How? First, by unsparing self-examination. The more careful we are to know the pride of our hearts, the less likely are we to be deceived by it. Second, by sincere self-condemnation: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31). If we would humble ourselves

before God, we must hate ourselves for our wicked pride and penitently confess it to Him. Third, by reminding ourselves of the judgments of God upon this sin. Herod was eaten up of worms because he took unto himself the glory due unto God (Acts 12:23). "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Fourth, by meditating upon the fearful sufferings of Christ in Gethsemane and on Golgotha: nothing will more effectually humble my proud heart than the realization that it was my very sins which occasioned the death of God's Lamb.

"Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:1). The value of an action is determined by the principle from which it proceeds. To give to the poor simply because it is customary, is merely the imitation of others. To minister unto the needy in order to increase our own influence and power, is a display of carnal ambition. To give so as to advance worldly interests is a manifestation of covetousness; if to seek applause, it is to gratify pride; if to alleviate the sufferings of my fellows, it is only the exercise of common humanity. But if I minister unto the needy out of a respect to the Divine authority and with the desire of pleasing God, acting from regard for His will, to which I long to be conformed in all things, then it is a spiritual act and acceptable unto the Lord. (Condensed from John Brown).

"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (v. 2). "Do not sound a trumpet" is a figurative way of saying, seek not to attract the attention of other people unto thyself. The word "hypocrite" is a significant one, for it properly denotes an actor who wears a mask, playing his part behind it. The Pharisees posed as being most devout worshippers of God and lovers of their fellow-men, when in reality they were self-righteous and sought only the applause of men: behind the outward appearance of piety and generosity they were the slaves of worldly and selfish passions. They performed their deeds of charity where the largest number of onlookers congregated together. Their "reward" was the admiration of shallow-minded men, as "dust" is the Serpent's meat.

The sin which Christ here reprehended is far more grievous than is commonly supposed, and we may add, far more prevalent, many of the Lord's own people being guilty of it. It consists of making men, rather than God, the judges and approvers of their actions. And do not we often fall into this snare? When we do that which is right, and yet incur thereby the displeasure of our fellows, are we not more grieved than when by sin we offend God Himself? If so, does not that clearly prove that our hearts have more regard to the censure of men than of the Lord? Are we not deeply hurt when men criticize and condemn our conduct and do we not rejoice when they praise us? Are we equally hurt when our fellows dishonour God? Are we more afraid of offending mortal man than the everlasting God? When in sore straits, which comforts us more: the assurances of earthly friends to relieve us or the promises of the Lord?

"But when thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (v. 3). This Divine precept is designed to restrain the corrupt ambition of our hearts after the praise of men. It goes much further than the commandment in verse 2. There the Lord had forbidden that ostentatious giving of alms which is done for the purpose of self-advertisement and the procuring of the applause of our fellows; while here He prohibits any self-satisfaction or complacency in the performing of this good work. It is strange how the commentators see in verse 3 nothing more than the repetition of that which is found in verse 2, quite missing the force of, "let not thy left hand know (approve of) what thy right hand doeth." We are to give alms in simplicity, with

the sole intent and desire of pleasing God only. When a good work has been done, we should dismiss it from our minds and not congratulate ourselves upon it, and press on to what is yet before us.

“That thine alms may be in secret” (v. 4). Here is still another instance where the language of Christ in this Discourse must not be taken literally and absolutely, or otherwise any act of mercy which came under the cognizance of our fellows would be thereby prohibited. Certainly the primitive Christians did not always conceal their donations, as is clear from Acts 11:29, 30. Secrecy itself may become a cloak to avarice, and under the pretence of hiding good works we may hoard up our money to spend upon ourselves. There are times when a person of prominence may rightly excite his backward brethren by his own example of liberality. So we must not understand Christ as here forbidding all charitable actions which may be seen by others, but rather understand Him to mean that we should perform them as unobtrusively as possible, making it our chief concern to aim at the approbation of God therein.

“That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:4). Though there be nothing meritorious about our best performances, yea, though everything we do is defiled, nevertheless, “God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb. 6:10). Nevertheless, it must be a work of faith—for “without faith it is impossible to please Him”—and a labour of love, if it is to receive God’s commendation. In the Divine administration it is so ordered that, in the end, the selfish person is disappointed, while he who seeks the good of others is himself the gainer. The more we truly aim at our Father’s approbation, the less shall we be concerned about either the praise or contempt of the world. The Divine reward, in the Day to come, will be given “openly,” before an assembled universe. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart: and then shall everyone have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:5).—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

6. *By the Brook.*

“Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1 Kings 17:3, 4). Notice well the order here: first the Divine command, and then the precious promise: Elijah must comply with the Divine behest if he were to be supernaturally fed. As we so often point out in these pages, most of God’s promises are conditional ones. And does not this explain why many of us do not extract the good of them: because we fail to comply with their stipulations. God will not put a premium on either unbelief or disobedience. Alas, we are our own worst enemies, and lose much by our perversity. We sought to show last month that the arrangement here made by God displayed His high sovereignty, His all-sufficient power, and His blessed wisdom; as it also made a demand upon the Prophet’s submissiveness and faith. We turn now to the sequel.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (v. 5). Not only did God’s injunction to Elijah supply a real test of his submission and faith, but it also made a severe demand upon his *humility*. Had pride been in the ascendant he would have said, Why should I follow such a course? it would be playing the coward’s part to “hide” myself. I am not afraid of Ahab, so I shall not go into seclusion. Ah, my reader, some of God’s commands are quite humiliating to haughty flesh and blood. It may not have struck His disciples as a very policy to pursue when Christ bade them, “when they persecute you in this city, *flee ye* into another” (Matt. 10:23); nevertheless, such were His orders, and He must be obeyed. And why should any servant of His demur at such a command as “hide thyself,” when of the Master Himself we read that “Jesus hid Himself” (John 8:59). Ah. He has left us an example in all things.

Furthermore, compliance with the Divine command would be quite a quite a tax on the *social* side of Elijah’s nature. There are few who can endure solitude: to be cut off from their fellows would indeed prove a severe trial to most people. Unconverted men cannot live without company: the sociability of those like-minded is necessary if they are to silence an uneasy conscience and banish troublesome thoughts. And is it much different with the great majority even of professing Christians? Alas, soul-satisfying, heart-ravishing communion with God, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, delighting themselves in the Lord, is an experience they seem to be little acquainted with. “Lo, I am with you always” has little real meaning to most of us. How different the contentment, joy, and usefulness of Bunyan in prison and Madame Guyon in her solitary confinement. Ah, Elijah might be cut off from his fellows, but not from the Lord Himself.

“So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord.” Without hesitation or delay the Prophet complied with God’s command. Blessed subjection to the Divine will was this: to deliver Jehovah’s message unto the king himself, or to be dependent upon ravens, he was equally ready. However unreasonable the precept might appear or however unpleasant the prospect, the Tishbite promptly carried it out. How different was this from the Prophet Jonah, who fled from the word of the Lord; yes, and how different the sequel—the one imprisoned for three days and nights in the whale’s belly, the other, at the end, taken to Heaven without passing through the

portals of death! Even God's servants are not all alike, either in faith, obedience or fruitfulness. O that all of us may be as prompt in our obedience to the Lord's Word as Elijah was.

"So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord." The Prophet neither delayed in complying with the Divine directions nor did he doubt that God would supply all his need. Happy it is when we can obey Him in difficult circumstances and trust Him in the dark. But why should we not place implicit confidence in God and rely upon His word of promise? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Has His word of promise ever failed? Then let us not entertain any unbelieving suspicions of His future care of us. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not so His promises. God's dealings with Elijah have been recorded for our instruction: O that they may speak loudly to our hearts, rebuking our wicked distrust and moving us to cry in earnest, "Lord, increase our faith." The God of Elijah still lives, and fails none who count upon His faithfulness.

"So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord." Elijah not only preached God's Word, but he practiced it. This is the crying need of our times. There is a great deal of talking, but very little of walking according to the Divine precepts. There is much activity in the religious realm, but only too often it is unauthorized by and in numerous instances is contrary to the Divine statutes. "But be ye *doers* of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22) is the unfailing requirement of Him with whom we have to do. To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that *doeth* righteousness is righteous" (1 John 3:7). Alas, how many are deceived at this very point: they prate about righteousness, but fail to practice it. "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).

"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook" (1 Kings 17:6). What proof was this that "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23). All nature shall change her course rather than one of His promises fail. O what comfort is there here for trusting hearts: what God has promised, He will certainly perform. How excuseless is our unbelief, how unspeakably wicked our doubtings. How much of our distrust is the consequence of the Divine promises not being sufficiently real and definite unto our minds. Do we meditate as we ought upon the promises of the Lord? If we were more fully "acquainted" with Him (Job 22:21), if we "set Him" more definitely before our hearts (Psa. 16:8), would not His promises have far more weight and power with us?

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). It is profitless to ask, *How?* The Lord has 10,000 ways of making good His word. Some reader of this very paragraph may be living from hand to mouth, having no stock of money or store of victuals: yea, not knowing where the next meal will come from. But if you be a child of His, God will not fail you, and if your trust be in Him, it shall not be disappointed. In some way or other "The Lord shall provide." "O, fear the LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing" (Psa. 34:9, 10); "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (food and clothing) shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). These promises are addressed to us: to encourage us to cleave unto God and do His will.

"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." Had He so pleased, the Lord could have fed Elijah by angels rather than by ravens. There

was then in Israel a hospitable Obadiah, who kept a secret table in a cave for a hundred of God's Prophets (1 Kings 18:4). Moreover, there were 7,000 faithful Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal, anyone of whom had doubtless deemed himself highly honoured to have sustained so eminent an one as Elijah. But God preferred to make use of fowls of the air. Why? Was it not so as to give both the Tishbite and us a signal proof of His absolute command over all creatures, and thereby of His worthiness to be trusted in the greatest extremities? And what is the more striking is that Elijah was better fed than the Prophets who were sustained by Obadiah, for they had only "bread and water" (18:4), whereas Elijah had meat also.

Though God may not employ literal ravens in ministering unto His needy servants and people today, yet He often works just as definitely and wondrously in disposing the selfish, the covetous, the hard-hearted, and the grossly immoral to render assistance to His own. He can and often does induce them contrary to their natural dispositions and miserly habits to deal kindly and liberally in ministering to our necessities. He has the hearts of all in His hand and turns them wheresoever He will (Prov. 21:1). What thanks are due unto the Lord for sending His provisions by such instruments! We doubt not that quite a number of our readers could bear similar testimony to this writer when he says, How often in the past did God in the most unlooked-for manner provide for our necessities: we had as soon expected ravens to bring us food as that we should receive from those who actually bestowed it.

"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening." Observe, no vegetables, fruit, or sweets are mentioned. There were no luxuries, but simply the bare necessities. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). But are we? Alas, how little of this godly contentment is now seen, even among the Lord's people. How many of them set their hearts upon the things which the godless make idols. Why are our young people dissatisfied with the standard of comfort which sufficed their parents? Why this hankering after a motor car, following the expensive fashions of the world in dress, and home furnishings? Money wasted on such things as vacuum sweepers and electric washers ought to have gone to the support of the Gospel. But God will not be mocked: view the rapidly mounting rates and taxes as a Divine judgment on carnal extravagance. Self must be denied if we are to show ourselves followers of Him who had not where to lay His head.

"And he drank of the brook" (1 Kings 17:6). Let us not overlook this clause, for no detail in Scripture is meaningless. Water in the brook was as truly and as definitely a provision of God's as the bread and meat which the ravens brought. Has not the Holy Spirit recorded this detail for the purpose of teaching us that the common mercies of providence (as we term them) are also the gifts of God. If we have been supplied with what is needful to sustain our bodies, then gratitude and acknowledgement are due our God. And yet how many there are, even among professing Christians, who sit down to their meals without first asking God's blessing, and rising up therefrom without thanking Him for what they have had. In this matter, too, Christ has left us an example, for on the occasion of His feeding the multitude, we are told that "Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed unto the disciples" (John 6:11). Then let us not fail to do the same.

"And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land" (1 Kings 17:7). Weigh attentively those five words. "And it came to pass" means far more than it merely happened: it signifies that the Divine decree concerning the same was now

fulfilled. "It came to pass" in the good providence of God, who orders all things after the counsel of His own will, and without whose personal permission nothing occurs, not even the falling of a sparrow to the ground (Matt. 10:29). How this should comfort the children of God and assure them of their security. There is no such thing as chance with reference to God—wherever this term occurs in the Bible it is always in connection with man, referring to something taking place without His design. Everything which occurs in this world is just as God ordained from the beginning (Acts 2:23). Endeavour to recall that fact, dear reader, the next time you are in difficulty and distress. If you are one of God's people He has provided for every contingency in His "Everlasting Covenant" and His mercies are "sure" (2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 55:3).

"And after a while" or (margin) "at the end of days" by which expression Lightfoot understood "after a year," which is frequently the sense of that phrase in Scripture. However this may be after an interval of some duration the brook dried up. Krummacher declares that the very name Cherith denotes "drought," as though it usually dried up more quickly than any other brook. Most probably it was a mountain stream, which flowed down a narrow ravine. Water was supplied it by the way of nature or ordinary providence, but the course of nature was now altered. The purpose of God was accomplished and the time of the Prophet's departure unto another hiding place had arrived. The drying up of the brook was a forceful reminder to Elijah of the transitoriness of everything mundane. "The fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. 7:31), and therefore "here have we no continuing city" (Heb. 13:14). Change and decay is stamped upon everything down here: there is nothing stable under the sun. We should therefore be prepared for sudden changes in our circumstances.

The ravens, as heretofore, brought the Prophet flesh and bread to eat each morning and evening, but he could not subsist without water. But why should not God supply the water in a miraculous way, as He did the food? Most certainly He could have done so. He could have brought water out of the rock, as He did for Israel, and for Samson out of a jawbone (Judges 15:18, 19). Yes, but the Lord is not confined to any one method, but has a variety of ways in bringing the same end to pass. God sometimes works one way and sometimes another, employing this means today and that tomorrow, in accomplishing His counsels. God is sovereign and acts not according to rule and rote. He ever acts according to His own good pleasure, and this He does in order to display His all sufficiency, to exhibit His manifold wisdom, and to demonstrate the greatness of His power. God is not tied and if He closes one door He can easily open another.

"That the brook dried up." Cherith would not flow forever, no, not even for the Prophet. Elijah himself must be made to feel the awfulness of that calamity which he had announced. Ah, my reader, it is no uncommon thing for God to suffer His own dear children to become enwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. True, He makes a very real difference both in the use and the issue of their stripes, but not so in the infliction of them. We are living in a world which is under the curse of a holy God, and therefore "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Nor is there any escape from trouble so long as we are left in this scene. God's own people, though the objects of His everlasting love, are not exempted for, "many are the afflictions of the righteous." Why? For various reasons and with various designs: one of them being to wean our hearts from things below and cause us to set our affection on things above.

"The brook dried up." To outward appearance that would have seemed a real misfortune, to carnal reason an actual calamity. Let us endeavour to visualize Elijah there at Cherith. The

drought was everywhere, the famine throughout the whole land: and now his own brook began to dry up. Day by day its waters gradually lessened until soon there was barely a trickle, and then it entirely ceased. Had he grown increasingly anxious and gloomy? Did he say, what shall I do? Must I stay here and perish? Has God forgotten me? Did I take a wrong step, after all, in coming here? It all depended upon how steadily his *faith* remained in exercise. If faith were active, then he admired the goodness of God in causing that supply of water to last so long. How much better for our souls, if instead of mourning over our losses, we praise God for continuing His mercies to us so long—especially when we bear in mind they are only *lent* to us, and that we deserve not the least of them.

Though dwelling in the place of God's appointing, yet Elijah is not exempted from those deep exercises of soul which are ever the necessary discipline of a life of faith. True, the ravens had, in obedience to the Divine command, paid him their daily visits, supplying him with food morning and evening, and the brook had flowed on its tranquil course. But faith must be tested—and developed. The servant of God must not settle down on his lees, but pass from form to form in the school of the Lord; and having learned (through grace) the difficult lessons of one, he must now go forward to grapple with others yet more difficult. Perhaps the reader may now be facing the drying brook of popularity, of failing health, of diminishing business, of decreasing friendships. Ah, a drying brook is a very real trouble.

And why does God suffer the brook to dry up? To teach us to trust in Himself, and not in His gifts. As a general rule He does not for long provide for His people in the same way and by the same means, lest they should rest *in them* and *expect help* from them. Sooner or later God shows us how dependent we are upon *Himself* even for supplies of everyday mercies. But the heart of the Prophet must be tested, to show whether his trust was in Cherith or in the living God. So it is in His dealings with us. How often we *think* we are trusting in the Lord, when really we are resting on comfortable circumstances; and when they become uncomfortable, how much faith have we!?!—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

3. *Its Nature.*

Man's spiritual impotency is a *moral* one, by which we mean that he is now unable to meet the requirements of the Moral Law. We employ this term "moral," first of all, in contrast from "natural," for the spiritual helplessness of fallen man is unnatural, inasmuch as it pertained not to the nature of man as created by God. Man (in Adam) was endowed with full ability to do whatever was required of him, but that ability he lost by the Fall. We employ this term "moral," in the second place, because it accurately defines the character of fallen man's malady. His inability is purely moral, because while he still possesses all moral as well as intellectual faculties requisite for right action, yet the *moral state* of his faculties is such as to render right action impossible. "Its essence is in the inability of the soul to know, love, or choose spiritual good; and its *ground* exists in that moral corruption of soul whereby it is blind, insensible, and totally averse to all that is spiritually good" (A. Hodge).

The affirmation that fallen man is morally impotent presents a serious difficulty unto many: they suppose that to assert his inability to will or do anything spiritually good is utterly incompatible with human responsibility, or the sinner's guilt. These difficulties are to be considered by us at length (D.V.) later. But it was necessary for us to allude unto these difficulties at the present stage because their efforts to show the reconcilability of fallen man's inability with his responsibility has led not a few defenders of the former truth to make predications which were unwarrantable and untrue. They felt that there is, there must be, some sense or respect in which even fallen man may be said *to be able* to will and do what is required of him, and they have laboured to show in what sense this ability exists, while at the same time man is, in another sense, unable.

Many Calvinists supposed that in order to avoid the awful error of Antinomian fatalism it was necessary to ascribe some kind of ability unto fallen man, and therefore they resorted unto the distinction between natural and moral inability: affirming that though man is now morally unable to do what God requires, yet he *has* a natural ability to do it, and therefore is responsible for the not doing of it. In the past we have ourselves made use of this distinction, and we still believe it to be a real and important one, though we are now satisfied that it is expressed faultily. There is a radical difference between a person being in possession of natural or moral faculties, and his possessing or not possessing *the power to use* those faculties aright, and in the accurate stating of the same lies the difference between a preservation of the doctrine of man's depravity and moral impotence, and the repudiation or at least the whittling down thereof.

It is at this point that many have burdened their writings with a metaphysical discussion of the human *will*, a discussion so abstruse that comparatively few of their readers possessed the necessary education or mentality to intelligently follow it. We do not propose to now canvass such questions as, Is the will of fallen man "free"? and if so, in what sense? To introduce such an inquiry here would divert attention too much from the more important query, Can man by any efforts of his *own* recover himself from the effects of the Fall? Suffice it, then, to insist that the sinner's unwillingness to come to Christ is far more than a mere negation or a not putting forth of such a volition: it is a positive thing, an active aversion from Him, a terrible and inveterate enmity against Him.

The term "ability" or "power" is not an easy one to define, for it is a *relative* one, having reference to something to be done or resisted: thus when we meet with the word, the mind at once asks, power to do *what?* ability to resist *what?* The particular kind of ability necessary is determined by the particular kind of actions to be performed: if it be the lifting of a heavy weight, it is physical ability which is needed; if to work out a sum in arithmetic, mental power; if to choose between good and evil, moral power. Man has sufficient physical and intellectual ability to keep many of the precepts of the Moral Law, yet no possible expenditure of such power could produce moral *obedience*. It may be that Gabriel has less natural and intellectual power than Satan. Suppose it is so, then what? Why, simply that no amount of ability can go beyond its own kind: love to God can never proceed from the powers possessed by Satan.

Let us now consider what the Scriptures teach concerning the bodily, mental, and moral abilities of fallen man. First, they teach that his *bodily* faculties are in a ruined state, that his physical powers are enfeebled, and this as a result of sin. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12): that this includes physical death, none of our readers is likely to deny. Now death necessarily implies a failure of the powers of the body: so, too, sickness, feebleness, the wasting of the physical energies and tissues are included: and all of this originates in sin as their moral cause, and are the penal results of it. Every aching joint, every quivering nerve, every pang of pain we experience, is a reminder of and a mark of God's displeasure upon the original misuse of our bodily powers in the garden of Eden.

Second, man's *intellectual* powers have suffered by the Fall. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). A very definite display of this ignorance was made by our first parents after their apostasy. Their sin consisted in allowing their affections to wander after a forbidden object, seeking their happiness not in the delightful communion of God, but in the suggestion presented to them by the Tempter. Like their descendants ever since, they loved and served the creature more than the Creator. Their conduct in hiding from God showed an alienation of affections. Had their delight been in the Lord as their chief good, then desire for concealment could not have possessed their minds. That foolish attempt to hide themselves from the searching eye of God betrayed their ignorance as well as their conscious guilt. Had not "their foolish heart been darkened" such an attempt had not been made, but "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22).

This mental darkness, this ignorance of mind is to man, unaided by supernatural grace, insuperable. Fallen man never would, never could, dispel this darkness, overcome this ignorance. He labours under an imbecility of mind to such a degree as to render it impossible for him to attain unto the true knowledge of God and to understand the things of the Spirit. He has an understanding by which he may know natural things: he can reason, investigate truth, and learn much of God's wisdom as it is displayed in the works of creation. He is capable of knowing the moral truths of God's Word as mere abstract propositions, but a true, spiritual, saving apprehension of them is utterly beyond his unaided powers. There is a positive defect and inability in his mind. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

By the "natural man" is unquestionably meant the unrenewed man, the man in whom the miracle of regeneration and illumination has not been effected. The context makes this clear:

“now we (Christians) have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God” (v. 12). And for what end had the Spirit been given unto them? Why, that they might be delivered from their chains of ignorance, that their inability of mind might be removed, so that “*we might know* the things that are freely given to us of God.” “Which things (of the Spirit) also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (v. 13). Here is a contrast between man’s wisdom and its teachings and the Spirit’s wisdom and His teachings. That the “natural man” of verse 14 is unregenerate is further seen from contrasting him from the “spiritual” man in verse 15.

A Divine explanation is here given as to why the natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God: it is a most cogent and solemn one—“for they are foolishness unto him.” That is, he rejects them because they are absurd to his apprehension: it is contrary to the very nature of the human mind to receive as truth that which it deems to be preposterous. And why do the things of the Spirit of God appear unto the natural man as foolishness? Are they not in themselves the consummation of wisdom? Wisdom is not folly; no, yet it may appear such and be so treated, even by minds which in other matters are of quick and accurate perception. The wisdom of the higher mathematician is foolishness to the illiterate. Why so? because he cannot understand it: he has not the power of mind to comprehend the mighty thoughts of a Newton.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them”: they are beyond his power to comprehend. Why so? Do not many of the unregenerate possess vigorous and clear-thinking minds? can they not reason accurately when they have perceived clearly? Have not some of the unconverted given the most illustrious displays of the powers of the human intellect? Why, then, cannot they know the things of the Spirit? This, too, is answered by 1 Corinthians 2:14: because those things require a peculiar power of discernment, which the unrenewed have not—“they are *spiritually* discerned,” and the natural man is not spiritual. Until he is taught of God—until the eyes of his understanding be enlightened (Eph. 1:18)—he will never see any beauty in the Christ of God or any wisdom in the Spirit of God.

If further proof be needed of the mental inability of the natural man it is furnished in those passages which speak of the Spirit’s illumination. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Hence “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” is said to be the gift of the Father (Eph. 1:17). Previously to that gift, “ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you” (1 John 2:27). From these passages it is evident: (1) That the mind of man is in a state of spiritual darkness. (2) That it continues, and will continue so, until the Spirit of God gives it light or knowledge. (3) That this giving of light or knowledge is by Divine power, a miracle of grace, as truly a miracle as when, at the beginning, the Lord said “let there be light.”

Against what has been pointed out above it has been objected, Man possesses the *organ* of vision and therefore he has the ability to see. Although he has not the light—remove the obstructing shutters and the prisoner in his dungeon sees. But let us not be deceived by such sophistry. It is not true that a man having a sound eye has the ability to see. It is often contrary to facts, both naturally and spiritually. Without light he cannot see, he has not the ability to do so. Yea, those

with sound eyes *and* light, too, cannot see *all* things, even things which are perceptible to others: myopia or shortsightedness prevents. A man may be able to see with the mind's eye a simple proposition who cannot see the force of a profound argument.

Third, the *moral* powers of man's soul are paralyzed by the Fall. Darkness on the understanding, ignorance in the mind, corruption of the affections, must of necessity radically affect motives and choice. To insist that either the mind or the will has a power to act contrary to motive is a manifest absurdity, for in that case it would not be a *moral* act at all: the very essence of morality is a capacity to be influenced by considerations of right and wrong. Were a rational mind to act without any motive—a contradiction in terms—it certainly would not be a moral act. Motives are simply the mind's view of things, influencing to action; and since the understanding has been blinded by sin and the affections so corrupted, then it is obvious that until he be renewed man will reject the good and choose the evil.

As we have already pointed out, man is unwilling to choose the good because he is *disinclined* thereto, and he chooses evil because his heart is *biased* thereunto: men love darkness rather than light. Surely no proof of such assertions is needed: all history too sadly testifies to their verity. It is a waste of breath to ask for evidence that man is inclined unto evil as the sparks fly upward. Common observation and our own personal consciousness alike bear witness to this lamentable fact. Equally plain is it that it is the derangement of the mind by sin which affects the moral power of perceiving right and wrong, enfeebling or destroying the force of moral motives.

An unregenerate and a regenerate man may contemplate the same subject matter, view the same objects, but how differently their moral perceptions! Therefore, their motives and actions will be quite different: the things seen by their minds being different, diverse effects are necessarily produced upon them. The one sees a "Root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2) in which there is "no form nor comeliness;" whereas the other sees One who is "altogether lovely." In consequence, He is despised and rejected by the former, whereas He is loved and embraced by the latter. While such are the views (perceptions) of the two individuals, respectively, such *must* be their choice and conduct. It is impossible to be otherwise. Their *moral perceptions* must be changed before it is possible for their volitions to be altered.

Such is the ruined condition of the fallen creature. No human power is able to effect any alteration in the moral perceptions of sinful men. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23). Nothing short of the miracle-working, new-creating power of God's all-mighty Spirit can enable the mentally and morally blind sinner to see Divine light clearly. Here, then, lies the moral inability of the natural man: it consists in the lack of adequate powers of moral perception. His moral sense is prostrated, his mind unable to properly discern between good and evil, truth and falsehood, God and mammon, Christ and Belial. Not that he can perceive no difference, but that he cannot appreciate in any tolerable degree the excellence of Truth or the glory of its Author. He cannot discern the real baseness of falsehood or the degradation of vice.

It is a great mistake to suppose that fallen man possesses adequate faculties for such moral perception, and lacks only the necessary moral light. The very opposite is the actual case. Moral light shines all around him, but his powers of vision are gone. He walks in darkness while the midday splendours of the sun of righteousness shine all around him. Fables are regarded as truth, but the Truth itself is rejected. Shadows are chased, but the Substance is ignored. The Gospel is

“*hid* to them that are lost” (2 Cor. 4:3). When the Lord of glory is presented to sinners they “see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him.” So blind is the natural man that he gropes in the noonday and stumbles over the Rock of ages. And unless a sovereign God is pleased to have mercy upon him, his moral blindness continues until he passes out into the “blackness of darkness forever.”

The deprivation of our nature consists not in the absence of intelligence, but of ability to *use* our reason in a wise and fit manner. That which man lost at the Fall was not a faculty, but a principle. He still retains everything which is requisite to constitute him a rational, moral, and responsible being; but he threw away that uprightness which secured the approbation of God. He lost the principle of *holiness*, and with it, all power to keep the Moral Law. Nor is this all: a foreign element entered into man, corrupting his whole being: an element diametrically opposed to God. The principle of holiness was supplanted by the principle of *sin*, and this has rendered man utterly unable to act in a spiritual manner. True, he may mechanically, or by way of imitation, perform spiritual acts (such as pray), yet he cannot perform them in a *spiritual* manner—from *spiritual* motives and for spiritual ends. He has no moral ability to do so. True, he can do many things, but none *rightly*—in a way pleasing unto God.—A.W.P.

A MUTUAL COMPLAINT.

My brethren, are we all clear in this respect? Do not many of God's people need to bemoan their worldliness? Once Christ was all with you, brethren; is it so, now? Once you despised the world, and condemned alike its pleasures and its frowns; but now are not the chains of worldly custom upon you? Are not many of you enslaved by fashion, and eaten up with frivolity? Do not some of you run as greedily as worldlings after the questionable enjoyments of this present life? Ought these things to be so? Can they remain so and your souls enjoy the Lord's smile? "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot be Christ's disciple, and be in fellowship with the ungodly. Come ye out from among them: be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing: then shall ye know right joyfully that the Lord is a Father to you, and that ye are His sons and daughters. But brethren, have ye gone unto Jesus without the camp, and do ye abide there with Him? Is the line of your separation visible—aye, is it existing? Is there any separation at all? Is it not often the case that the professed people of God are mixed up with the sons of men so that you cannot discern the one from the other? If it be so with any of us, let him humble himself and let him cry in bitterness "Oh that I were as in months past."

Brothers and sisters, feel ye the breath of the winnowing fan again? How is it with you in private prayer? Are there not believers, and we hope true believers too, who are lax in devotion? The morning prayer is brief but alas! it is not fervent; the evening prayer is too often sleepy; ejaculations are few and far between; communion with Heaven is distant, suspended, almost nonexistent in many cases. Look ye to this, my brethren, let each man commune with his own heart, and be still. Think not of others just now, but let each one consider his ways. How is it with your love to the souls of sinners? Does the tear tremble in your eye as it once did for lost souls, perishing without Christ? Alas, upon how many has a hardening influence operated. Ah, and this is true even of us ministers. We have grown professional in our service, and now we preach like automatons, wound up for a season, to run down when the discourse is over, and we have little more care for the souls of men than if they were so much dirt.

Fifth, these regrets by themselves are useless. It is unprofitable to read these words of Job and say, "Just so, that is how I feel," and then continue in the same way. If a man has neglected his business and so has lost his trade, it may mark a turn in his affairs when he says, "I wish I had been more industrious"; but if he abides in the same sloth as before, of what use is his regret? If he shall fold his arms and say, "O that I had dug that plot of land; O that I had sown that field," no harvest will come because of his lamentations. Up, man, up and labour, or you will have the sluggard's reward—rags and poverty will be your portion. If a man be in declining health, if drunkenness and riot have broken down his constitution, it may mark a salutary reform in his history if he confesses his former folly; but if his regrets end in mere expressions, will these heal him? I think not. So neither will a man, affected by spiritual decline, be restored by the mere fact of his knowing himself to be so. Let him go to the beloved Physician, drink of the waters of life again, and receive the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations.

I have known some, I fear, who even satisfied themselves with expressions of regret. "Ah," say they, "I am a deep experienced man, I can go where Job went; I can mourn and lament as Job did." Remember, many have been on Job's dunghill, who knew nothing of Job's God; many have imitated David in his sins, who never followed him in his repentance. They have gone from

their sin into Hell by the way of presumption, whereas David went from it to Heaven by the road of contrition and forgiveness. Never let us, merely because we feel some uneasiness within, conclude that this suffices. If in the dead of the night you should hear thieves in your house, you would not congratulate yourself because you were awake to hear them. You would waive all such comfortable reflections till the rogues were driven out and your property was safe; and so, when you know things are amiss with you, do not say, "I am satisfied, because I know it is so." Up, man, and with all the strength that God's Holy Spirit gives you, strive to drive out these traitors from your bosom, for they are robbing your soul of his best treasures.

Sixth, these regrets when they are necessary are very *humbling*. Meditate now for a minute. Think, dear brother, what was thy position in thy happiest times, in those days that are now past. Had you any love to spare then? You were zealous; were you too zealous? You were gracious; were you too gracious? Nay, in our best estate, we were very far short of what we ought to be, and yet we have gone back from even that. It was a poor attainment at the best, have we fallen even from that? During the time we have been going back, we ought to have gone forward. What enjoyments we have lost by our wanderings; what progress we have missed! As John Bunyan well puts it, when Christian fell asleep and lost his roll, he had to go back for it, and he found it very hard going back, and, moreover, he had to go on again, so that he had to traverse three times the road he need only have traversed once; and then he came in late at the gates of the palace Beautiful, and was afraid of the lions, of which he would have had no fear had not the darkness set in. We know not what we lose, when we lose growth in grace.

Alas, how much the Church has lost through us, for if the Christian becomes poor in grace, he lessens the church's wealth of grace. We have a common exchequer as a church, and everyone who takes away his proportion from it, robs the whole. Dear brethren, how accountable are many of us for the low tone of religion in the world, especially those of us who occupy the foremost ranks. If grace be at a low ebb with us, others say, "Well, look at so and so; I am as good as he." So much in the church do we take the cue from one another, that each one of us is in a measure responsible for the low state of the whole. Some of us are very quick to see the faults of others; may it not be that those faults are our own children? Those who have little love to others generally discover that there is little love in the church, and I notice that those who complain of the inconsistencies of others, are usually the most inconsistent persons themselves. Shall I be a robber of my fellow Christian? Shall I be an injury to the cause of Christ? Shall I be a comfort unto sinners in their sin? Shall I rob Christ of His glory? I, who was saved from such depths of sin; I, who have been favoured with such enjoyments of His presence; I, that have been on Tabor's top with Him and seen Him transfigured; I, that have been in His banqueting house and have drunk out of the flagons of His love—shall I be so devoid of grace, that I shall even injure His children and make His enemies to blaspheme? Wretch that I am, to do this.

Seventh, yet these regrets may be made very *profitable* in many other ways. First, they show us what human nature is. Have we gone back so far? O, brethren, we might have gone back to perdition: we should have done so, if it had not been for the grace of God. What a marvel it is that God has borne with our ill manners, when He might justly have laid the reins on our necks, and suffered us to rush on in the road which we so often hankered after. So you see, dear brethren, what a body of death we carry with us, and what a terrible power it possesses. When you see

the mischief that corruption has already done, never trust yourself, but seek for new grace every day.

Again—learn to prize what spiritual blessings yet remain. If you have such better regrets for what you have lost, hold fast what is still yours. Slip back no further, for if those slips have cost you so much, take heed that they do not ruin you. To continue presumptuous may be a proof that our profession is rotten throughout: only a holy jealousy can remove the suspicion of insincerity. Let your previous failings teach you to walk cautiously for the future. Be jealous, for you serve a jealous God. Since gray hairs may come upon you, here and there, and you may not know it, search, try yourself day by day, lest you relapse yet more.

This should teach us to live by faith, since our best attainments fail us. We rejoice today, but we may mourn tomorrow. What a mercy it is that our salvation does not depend on what we are or what we feel. Christ has finished our salvation; no man can destroy what He hath completed. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and is safe there; none can pluck us out of Jehovah's hands. Since we so frequently run aground, it is clear that we should be wrecked altogether if we went to sea in a legal vessel with self for our pilot. Let us keep to the good ship of free grace, steered by immutable faithfulness, for none other bring us to the desired haven. But oh, let that free grace fill us with ardent gratitude. Since Christ has kept us, though we could not keep ourselves, let us bless His name, and overwhelmed with obligations, let us rise with a solemn determination that we will serve Him better than we have ever done before; and may His blessed Spirit help us to make the determination a fact.

Eighth, these regrets *ought not to be continual*: they ought to be removed, decidedly removed, by an earnest effort, made in God's strength to get back to the position which we occupied before, and to attain something better still. Dear brothers and sisters, if any of you desire now to come into the higher life, and to feel anew your first love, what shall I say to you? Go back to where you started. Do not stay discussing whether you are a Christian or not. Go to Christ as a poor guilty sinner. When the door to Heaven seems shut to me as a saint, I will get through it as a sinner, trusting in the precious blood of Jesus. Come and stand again, as though all your sins were on you still, at the foot of the cross, where still may be seen the dripping blood of the infinitely precious atonement. Saviour, I trust Thee again: guilty, more guilty than I was before, a sinful child of God, I trust Thee: "wash me thoroughly from mine iniquities, and purge me from my sin." You will never have your graces revived, unless you go to the Cross. Begin life again. The best air for a man to breathe when he is sickly is said to be that of his birthplace: it was at Calvary we were born; it is only at Calvary we can be restored when we are declining. Do the first works; as a sinner, repair to the Saviour and ask to be restored.

Then, as a further means of health, search out the cause of your declension. Probably it was a neglect of private prayer. Where the disease began, there must the remedy be applied. Pray more earnestly, more frequently, more importunately. Or, was it a neglect of hearing the Word? Were you enticed by novelty or cleverness away from a really searching and instructive ministry? Go back, and feed on wholesome food again: perhaps that may cure the disease. Or, have you been too grasping after the world? Brother, you loved God when you had but one shop, you have two now, and are giving all your time and thoughts to business, and your soul is getting lean. Man alive, strike off some of that business, for it is a bad business that makes your soul poor. I would not check industry or enterprise for a single moment; let a man do all he can, but not at the ex-

pense of his soul. Push on, but do not push down your soul. You may buy gold too dear, and may attain a high position in this world at a cost which you may have to rue all your days. Where the mischief began there apply the remedy. And I urge upon you, and most of all upon myself, do not make excuses for yourselves; do not palliate your faults; do not say it must be so; do not compare yourselves among yourselves or you will be unwise; but to the perfect image of Christ let your hearts aspire, to the ardour of your Divine Redeemer, who loved not Himself, but loved you.

There are some here who will say, "I do not comprehend this sermon: I have no cause to look back with regret. I have always been much the same as I am. I know nothing of religion." The day shall come when you will envy the least and most trembling believer. To you careless, Christless sinners, the day shall come when you will cry to the rocks for mercy, and beg them to conceal you from the eyes of Him whom now you dare despise. I beseech you be not high minded, lift up your horn on high, speak not so exceeding proud—bow before the Christ of God and ask Him to give you the new life. For even if that new life has declined and become sickly, it is better than the death in which you dwell. Go and seek grace of Him who alone can give it, and He will grant it you for His infinite mercy's sake. Amen.—C. H. Spurgeon, 1871.

STRANGE FIRE.

At a still later date it is recorded of Uzziah the king that, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD . . . And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house" (2 Chron 26:16-19, 21). What a solemn lesson was that! How plainly it manifested the sore displeasure of the Lord against those who chafe against the restrictions which He imposes, and who determine to take upon themselves a work to which He has not called them. Yes, king though he was, yet his royal dignity could not afford shelter from Divine judgment, for God is no respecter of persons, and monarch and menial alike must obey His commands or suffer the consequences of insubordination.

Now my reader, have these unspeakably solemn incidents no message for us today? It is true that in this Christian dispensation there is no Divinely appointed class to come between the Lord and His people. It is true that all believers are "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). But this does not mean that there are no Divinely called and Divinely qualified officers of Christ to administer the affairs of His kingdom, and that every Christian may regard himself as entitled to preach His Gospel and administer His ordinances. No indeed: very far from it. Nothing but the utmost confusion can ensue where every Tom, Dick, and Harry pushes himself forward to perform work for which he is not qualified. The principle of "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but *he that is called of God*" (Heb. 5:4) holds good as truly today as it did in Old Testament times.

"My brethren, be *not* many masters (R.V. "teachers"), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1). The word which is here rendered "masters" signifies "teachers" being the plural of the one used in John 3:10, "art thou a master in Israel?" "Many converts to Christianity would be desirous of the distinction of *teachers*: with a view to the credit and pre-eminence of that office, or from a mistaken idea that they could not glorify God or do good to men in other states; while perhaps they were not aware of the weight and difficulties of the work, and the solemn account which must be given of it. But they ought to know and seriously consider that teachers must stand a greater or more strict judgment than other men . . . Did men but truly weigh the importance and difficulty of the sacred ministry, the account which must be given of it, the trials and temptations to which it exposes them, they would be less forward than they sometimes are in aspiring to that distinction" (Thomas Scott).

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they *heap to themselves teachers*, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). During recent years much has been written upon the first part of this verse, but in all our reading (now more than two million pages of religious and theological literature) we do not recall having seen a single comment upon the words we have placed in italics. It is a most significant and ominous fact that the

fulfillment of these two predictions have synchronized, for the rejection of “sound doctrine” and the multiplying of men who term themselves “Bible teachers” have kept pace steadily with each other. The solemn thing is that the “teachers” referred to in 2 Timothy 4:3 are not Divinely called, but self-appointed ones, and they may easily be identified by their opposition to the Truth. Not one of the “Bible teachers” we have read believes in Unconditional Election, Particular Redemption, or the Christian Sabbath!

Not only has there been a noticeable multiplication of religious “teachers” during the last 50 years, but the rank and file of professing Christians have, in many instances, been pressed into the doing of “Personal work.” In some circles of considerable prominence young Christians (of both sexes) are taught it is their bounden duty to become “soul winners,” and that only by regularly “leading sinners to Christ” can their own spiritual lives be kept in a healthy estate. Every once in a while we receive letters from those who have been brought into deep distress by such erroneous teachings. They did not feel qualified for the task, but unwilling to be thought “strange” by their friends, they ignored the instincts of modesty and propriety, and spoke to their acquaintances about Christ, only to be repulsed and made miserable through lack of “success.” Then they fear there must be something seriously wrong with themselves, seeing that God withholds His blessing from their efforts.

Of course such “teachers” and leaders make a pretence of appealing to the Scriptures in support of their vagaries. “Pretence” we say, for they cannot find a single sentence in either the Old or the New Testaments where the Lord bade the rank and file of His people to engage in any such activities. What, then, do they do? Why, they “wrest” the Word of God and wrongly “divide” the same. In the past we have called attention to several misapplied and wrongly appropriated *promises* of the New Testament; we now direct notice to some *precepts* which are put to an entirely false use. These *promises*, as we showed, pertained only unto the Apostles and their immediate successors—so, too, the *precepts* we are to look at are given to God’s official servants and not unto the saints at large.

“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). He said *unto whom?* The verse immediately preceding tells us: unto “the Eleven.” What right has any man to apply the apostolic commission promiscuously? None whatever—to do so is to play fast and loose with the Holy Word of God. In the parallel passage those whom Christ here ordered to preach the Gospel He authorized to “baptize” and to “teach” (Matt. 28:19, 20) which makes it quite clear to any God-fearing soul that such offices can only be discharged by the duly authorized ministers of God. To “preach the Gospel” is no child’s play: it requires an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, long training in the school of Christ, an experimental acquaintance with its contents, and a special endowment from on High. “Novices” are debarred from this holy vocation (1 Tim. 3:6), for instead of attempting to expound the Divine mysteries, they themselves need to be thoroughly indoctrinated.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Probably quite a number of our readers will be surprised to hear that such a verse as this is given a general meaning and application to all God’s people and that babes in Christ (and empty professors) are told they are Christ’s “ambassadors”; but we ought not to be surprised at anything in this decadent and demented age. One had thought the very term “ambassadors” would be quite enough to prevent such an excuseless mistake. An ambassador is the official representative of a potentate duly authorized to

mistake. An ambassador is the official representative of a potentate duly authorized to act on his sovereign's behalf. King George has his ambassador in Washington: but suppose that every British subject now residing in the U.S.A. should busy themselves in diplomatic affairs and pretend they were ambassadors of the Court of St James: not only would they serve no useful purpose, but they would mislead people and create endless confusion. And this is exactly what these "personal workers" do; *uncalled* of God, *unqualified* by the Spirit, possessing the merest smattering of the Truth, they *distort* the Gospel and *delude* those whose ears they gain.

It is at this very point that untold damage has been done. Wrongly taught themselves, holding an entirely false conception of God's purpose and His design in the Gospel, these "personal workers" have gone forth only to deceive and seduce the unwary. Telling all who will listen to them that God loves *everybody*, that Christ died for the redemption of the *whole human race*, they assure their hearers they can be saved immediately by "simply accepting Christ as your personal Saviour." They know not that God "hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 5:5), and that Christ died to "save His People from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). They say little or nothing about the requirements of God, the righteous demands of His Law, the fact that His wrath is revealed from Heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom. 1:18), and that the wicked must sincerely repent of and forsake their sins *before* they can obtain mercy.

This "personal work" campaign is a *cheapening* of the Gospel, a lowering of God's standard, a perverting of His Truth, and has produced a generation of unregenerate professors, who now infest the churches and assemblies. The "making of converts" is their goal, and *quantity* rather than *quality* is the great desire. We were personally acquainted with one of these personal workers, who had three years' training in a large "Bible Institute." He had vowed to "win a soul to Christ" every day that year. We met him after a rainy spell, and he told us the weather had sadly interfered with his schedule, for while it was so wet there was no one in the public parks whom he could accost. He was then "five souls behind," and he told us, "I shall have to make up for lost time and win six souls to Christ today." The tragic thing is that so few now can see anything wrong with this *blasphemous burlesque*.

It is needless to examine all the passages appealed to by these "teachers" in support of their errors, but we will look at one or two more. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 11:30). Yes, because he has been specially called, qualified, and owned of God. But let Scripture interpret Scripture: "They that be *wise* shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the *stars* forever and ever" (Dan. 12:3), and as to what is signified by the "stars" Revelation 1:20 informs us. As to what is meant by the "watchman" in Ezekiel 33:2-6 the very next verse tells us, "O son of man, (the Prophet Ezekiel), I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the Word at My mouth, and warn them, for Me."

When a sinner has been saved the Saviour's word to him is, "Return to thine house, and *show* how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8:39). We are to "*show forth* the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). But is a young Christian never to open his mouth in testimony for Christ? We have not said so; but he must be very careful or otherwise he will be guilty of disobeying that Divine injunction, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6). We shall not go far wrong if we are regulated by that exhortation, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and

be ready always to give an answer to every man *that asketh you* a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Let us beware of “strange fire”—zeal which is not according to knowledge. Let us be on our guard lest the Lord has occasion to ask us, “Who hath required *this* at *your* hand?” (Isa. 1:2). Read diligently through the whole of the Epistles and see where the members of any church were exhorted to do “personal work” or seek to “win souls to Christ,” and you will find there is *not one*. Then be governed by God’s Word even though all your religious associates deem you “cold,” “self-centered,” or “ensorious.”—A.W.P.

