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GOD’S VOICE IN JUDGMENTS.

“Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good” (Jer. 18:11). As the “therefore” denotes, practical application is here made of what has been before us in the context. The Prophet had been called upon to witness an object-lesson set before him in the potter’s house. Then the Lord had made known to him the relations which He sustains unto nations, viz., Sovereign, Ruler and Judge over them, and the principles which regulate His dealings with them: authority and power, righteousness and mercy. A specific yet illustrative example of such is here shown us . . . Israel had long provoked God to His face, and though He had been slow to anger, the time had now arrived when He would take them to task and deal with them for their wickedness. The dark clouds of His wrath were suspended over them, yet even at this late hour if they genuinely departed from their evil ways and walked the paths of virtue, mercy should “rejoice against judgment.”

God speaks to us not only through His word (both personal and written) but also through His works and ways. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psa. 19:1-4). Creation testifies to the excellencies of the Creator. The Divine providences, too, are vocal: “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity” (Jer. 22:21)—My bounties declared My goodness and should have melted your hearts. God’s judgments also carry with them a definite message: that is why we are exhorted to “hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it” (Micah 6:9)—observe how the verse opens with “the LORD’S voice crieth unto the city.” His “rod” bids us consider the Hand that wields it and calls upon us to forsake our sins.

When God speaks in judgment it is the final warning that He is not to be trifled with. When the Almighty is roused to fury who can stand before Him? Nations are no more able to successfully resist Him than can the clay hinder the fingers of the potter who shapes it; yea they are counted as “the small dust of the balance” (Isa. 40:15), which signifies utter insignificance. May we exclaim, “who would not fear Thee, O King of nations!” (Jer. 10:7). No spiritual warrant whatever has any people to put their trust in human greatness, the sire of their armies, the excellency of their equipment, the strength of their defenses. God has but to blow upon them and they are immediately overthrown, entirely demolished. Mark how this is emphasized in Jeremiah 18, “At what *instant* I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down and to destroy it” (v. 7): it is done in a moment—suddenly, swiftly, invincibly.

“Behold I frame evil against you.” It is the evil of punishment about to be inflicted on the evil of sin. It is no momentary outburst of uncontrollable anger, but dispassionate and deliberated retribution, and when the almighty “frames” or devises that evil against a kingdom, no power can deliver it. Though Lucifer himself says, “I will ascend above the heights of the cloud: I will be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14), yet is his proud boast seen to be an empty one, for the Lord says, “yet thou shalt be brought down to Hell, to the sides of the Pit” (v. 15). “Damascus is waxed feeble and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her as a woman in travail” (Jer.

49:24)—suddenly, sorely, irresistibly, from which there is no escape. How this should make the wicked to tremble and depart from their evil ways! God turneth “a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein” (Psa. 107:34).

“Behold *I* frame evil against you.” Calamities and judgments come not by chance, nor are they originated by inferior agents or secondary causes. Though He may be pleased to make use of human instruments, yet the Lord is the Author of and principal Agent in them. Before the Assyrians fell upon apostate Israel Jehovah declared, “I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets” (Isa. 10:6). The Lord moved him, though he was in no wise conscious of any Divine impulse or commission. And when God had finished making use of the Babylonians and raised up the Medes and Persians to humiliate them into the dust, He declared of Cyrus “thou art *My* battle-axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer. 51:20). Cyrus was as truly God’s “servant” as Moses or any of the Prophets: see Isaiah 45:1; Ezra 1:1. Curses as much as blessings, calamities as much as boons, judgments as truly as favours proceed from the Almighty, and it is but a species of atheism to deny the fact.

“Behold *I* frame evil against you.” How this word needs to be pressed upon this evil and adulterous generation, which is occupied with anyone and anything rather than the living God. In a land where Bibles are so plentiful we are without excuse when we look no higher than the agencies now threatening us. Yea, it is a grievous sin for us to throw the blame of our present trials and troubles upon human instruments instead of upon our national iniquities, and refuse to see *God* employing those instruments against us. Hitler is but a scourge in the hand of the Almighty. Nor are they helping any to fix their gaze on the supreme Framer of Evil who constantly direct attention to the machinations of the pope and his longing to see the British empire destroyed. Doubtless the papacy was behind the entrance of Italy into active conflict and the perfidy of France, as she is responsible for Eire’s refusal to grant us naval bases, of Vichy’s steady opposition, of the French Canadian’s disloyalty, and of many other hostile factors and forces; but *who* is permitting the “Mother of Harlots” to employ her powerful influence thus? None other than the Lord of Hosts. He is righteously using Rome as a rod on the back of an apostate Protestantism.

We cannot expect the unbelieving nations to look beyond Hitler and his fellows, but it is the privilege of Christians to “look unto *the LORD*” (Micah 7:7). It is the very nature of faith to be occupied with its Author. It is the duty of faith to “set the LORD always before” it (Psa. 16:8). When the Ammonites and Moabites came up against Judah, Jehoshaphat turned unto God and said, “we have no might against this great company that come against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are *upon Thee*” (2 Chron. 20:12). This is the first message to His own people which the voice of the Lord has in His judgments: look above the human scourges and behold *My* hand in righteous retribution. And it is the business of God’s servants at such a time to urge upon the saints to “consider in thine heart that the LORD He is God in Heaven above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else” (Deut. 4:39). O that it may be the experience of both writer and reader—“Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens” (Psa. 123:1) and then shall we prove for ourselves “they looked unto Him, and were lightened” (Psa. 34:5).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

26. *Profession Tested*: Matthew 7:22, 23.

What is the relation between our present verses and the one immediately preceding? Matthew Henry gives the following as his analysis of verses 21-23. "1. Christ here shows by a plain remonstrance that an outward profession of religion, however remarkable, will not bring us to Heaven, unless there be a correspondent conversation. 2. The hypocrite's plea against the strictness of this law, offering other things in lieu of obedience. 3. The rejection of this plea as frivolous." Personally we think William Perkins perceived more clearly the connection between verses 22, 23 and verse 21: "In these two verses Christ returns to explain and confirm the first conclusion of the former verse concerning those professors that shall not be saved. The words contain two parts: first, a description of the persons by their behaviour; secondly, a declaration of their condemnation." For our own part we regard the verses which are now to be before us as containing an exemplification and amplification of what had been affirmed in the preceding one, showing that the most gifted and eminent professors will not be treated as exceptions if they fail to meet the fundamental requirement of God's kingdom.

In the previous verse Christ had declared, "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." Something far more important and radical than a mere lip profession is needed in order to participate in spiritual blessings, even a full surrendering of ourselves unto Christ and a performing of the Divine will from the heart. But now the Lord went on to affirm something still more solemn and searching: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity." Here it is not simply the rank and file of those claiming to be the followers of Christ who are in view, but the most influential ones among them, their *leaders and preachers*. Nor does He single out a few exceptional cases, but declares there are "many" who have occupied positions of prominence and authority, who wrought mighty works in His name, but so far from enjoying His approbation are denounced by Him as workers of iniquity.

First, it should be pointed out that the gifts and works of these men are described according to the nature of those which obtained in Bible times. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as "prophesying" today, nor has there been for eighteen centuries past. A Prophet was the mouthpiece of God. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit he gave forth a Divine revelation. In other words, he spoke by Divine inspiration. It was not an ordinary and natural gift, but an extraordinary and spiritual one. It was withdrawn when the Canon of Scripture was completed, for in His written Word we now have the Divine will fully revealed, containing as it does a complete and perfect Rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Consequently, any person who now poses as a Divine Prophet, claiming to have a special message from God, is either an impostor or fanatic: an emissary of Satan seeking to beguile the unwary, or a neurotic who suffers his enthusiasm to run away with him, or an egotist who desires to direct attention to himself and occupy the limelight.

Because a man spoke by Divine inspiration in Bible times it was no proof that he was regenerate. Here, as everywhere else, God exercised His sovereignty, employing as His mouthpieces whom He pleased. Thus we find Balaam the soothsayer uttered some remarkable predictions concerning Israel, the Messiah Himself, and the judgments which

should overtake various nations—all of which were fulfilled. We are told that “the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth” (Num. 23:5), that he “knew the knowledge of the Most High” and “saw the vision of the Almighty” (Num. 24:16), yet he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15) and perished amid the enemies of the Lord (Num. 31:8). So also of the apostate king of Israel it is written, “the Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied,” so that it became a proverb, “Is Saul also among the Prophets?” (1 Sam. 10:10, 11). More remarkable still is the case of Caiaphas, the man who delivered up the Redeemer into the hands of Pilate, for of him we are told: “And this spake he not of himself (but by Divine inspiration): but being high priest that year, he *prophesied* that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:51, 52).

“And in Thy name have cast out devils” or “demons” (Matt. 7:22). This was another of the supernatural gifts or powers bestowed upon men at the beginning of the Christian era, and yet it was not confined to the regenerate. It is at least open to doubt whether the man mentioned in Luke 9:49 was such, for there we are told that, “John answered and said, Master, We saw one casting out demons in Thy name and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us.” But a clearer case to the point is that of the betrayer of our Lord. In Matthew 10:1 we are expressly told that, “when Christ had called unto Him His twelve disciples He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out” and one of that company was Judas Iscariot! Had Judas failed to perform this feat his fellow Apostles had at once had their suspicions aroused and when the Saviour announced, “One of you shall betray Me,” instead of asking, “Lord, is it I?” had at once known He referred to Judas. “And in Thy name done many wonderful works” or “works of power,” miraculous works—the Greek word occurring again in Matthew 11:20 in connection with Christ’s “mighty works.” This power, too, was conferred upon Judas.

If it should be asked, Why should God so remarkably endow the unregenerate, even using them as His mouthpieces? several answers may be returned. First, as has been intimated above, in order to exemplify God’s uncontrollable sovereignty over and ownership of all men. He can employ His creatures as He pleases and elect as His agents and instruments whom He will, and none can say Him nay. Second, to display His invincible power. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1), and if the king’s heart, so every man’s; but how little is that realized today. Balaam was but a puppet in His hands, unable to resist His will. Caiaphas was the enemy of Christ and yet compelled to utter a remarkable prophecy about Him! Third, to evince that supernatural gifts and endowments—though highly esteemed among men—are not the most precious of His bestowments: something infinitely more valuable is reserved for the objects of His everlasting love. What comparison is there between Balaam’s prophecy and the “new song” in the mouths of the redeemed, between the miracles performed by Judas and being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light!

Our Lord thus plainly intimates that men may conduct themselves as His commissioned servants—acting in His name—that they may be endowed with the most remarkable gifts, that they may perform supernatural works, and yet not be saved. It was so at the beginning of this dispensation; it is so now. It would be a great mistake to draw the conclusion that because our Lord describes these unregenerate professors according to the terminology of the first century, when ministers were endowed with extraordinary

gifts and exercised supernatural powers, that it has no direct hearing on leaders among professing Christians in this twentieth century. Because verse 22 depicts conditions which no longer obtain in kind, that is no proof that it has no immediate application unto men of prominence in the religious realm today. Rather should we reason that if such a fearful warning was needed at the beginning of this era when men were so wonderfully gifted, how much more pertinent is it to those of lesser talents and abilities in this degenerate generation!

The modern equivalent of prophesying in the name of Christ would be *preaching* in His name: the casting out of demons would find its present counterpart in the deliverance of Satan's slaves chronicled by our "city missions"—such as the reforming of drunkards, reclaiming of fallen women, recovering of drug addicts—while the "wonderful works" may be taken as referring to the costly buildings termed "churches" with their huge membership, and the sensational achievements of "missionaries" in heathen lands. Not that we wish to imply that all engaged in such activities are unregenerate, nevertheless after close observation and personal contact with many of these workers, we seriously doubt whether more than a small percentage of them have really been born again. Nor should this at all astonish us. Our Lord Himself distinctly declared of "many" of those serving in His name, "I never knew you" and if that were true of those who wrought during the early days of the Christian era, why should it be thought strange that such a state of affairs pertains now that Christendom is so apostate?

Here, then, is what is most solemn of all in this awe-inspiring passage: that there will be many preachers, Christian leaders and workers—and in view of our Lord's use of the word in verse 13, probably the great majority of them—who will be shut out of Heaven. Sad and awful as this is, yet from our observation in many sections of Christendom and from what generally obtains, we cannot say this surprises us. Among the young men accepted as students for the ministry, is there any larger percentage of regenerate ones than of the young men making a Christian profession who enter not the ministry? We are far from believing they are all hypocrites. Doubtless there are many thousands who select the ministry as their avocation because of the social prestige and financial remuneration it affords. But large numbers of youths who receive the Word "with joy" (Matt. 13:20) mistake their religious enthusiasm and fervour for a call from God and love for souls, and having more zeal than knowledge and friends who encourage rather than counsel caution, they make the great mistake.

Once the young man is accepted as a student for the ministry his regeneration is (with very rare exceptions) tacitly assumed. And what is there, then, which is in anywise calculated to open his deceived eyes? Some of the denominations require him to spend years at a university in order to obtain a degree, and there his time and energies are strenuously occupied with subjects that contain nothing whatever for the soul, but only that which is apt to foster intellectual conceit. One who has mistaken carnal ambition and enthusiasm for a call from God is not likely to find a course in sociology, psychology, logic, philosophy, etc., likely to disillusion him. And even when the young man is not required to enter a university, he has to take a course in "divinity." In other words he is introduced to the sacred study of theology as a subject on which to exercise his intellectual powers, as a text book over which he must pore and whose contents he must master in order to successfully pass examinations thereon. The result is, in the vast majority of cases, he is so sickened therewith that after his ordination he never again opens a theological treatise.

Nor is there any more hope, humanly speaking, that his eyes may be opened to his lost condition after he has been ordained and called to a charge. If he is to "make good" therein, such a multitude of duties demand his attention that there is little opportunity for the careful examination of his own soul. There are so many departments of the church he has to superintend, so many sermons and addresses he must prepare each week, so many calls to make, that he has little leisure for self-introspection. He is so occupied with the concerns and needs of others, that attention to the ministerial injunction, "take heed *unto thyself*" (1 Tim. 4:16) is crowded out. It is greatly to be feared that thousands of ministers today have ground to lament, "they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but *mine own vineyard* have I not kept" (Song. 1:6). But whatever be the contributing causes and occasions of this tragic fatality, the fact remains that the Divine Judge is yet going to say unto many of those who preached and wrought in His name, "I never knew you."

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). There are five things here which claim our attention, though utterly insufficient is any mortal to do them justice. First, the time-mark: "then." Second, the character in which Christ is here viewed: as the Judge of men. Third, the solemn verdict announced: "I never knew you." Fourth, the fearful sentence imposed: "depart from Me." Fifth, the real character of religious formalists: "ye that work iniquity." It would not be possible to assemble together five things of greater gravity and moment than these. And what human pen is competent to comment upon subjects so awesome? Oh that both writer and reader may approach the same with becoming reverence and solemnity!

"And *then*" looks back to the "in that day" of the previous verse. It is the Day of final retribution, when "every man's work shall be made manifest: for the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed with fire and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). It is "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5), "because He hath appointed a Day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17: 31). Who can conceive of the consternation which will possess the hearts of impenitent rebels, of unmasked hypocrites, of disillusioned formalists, as they are compelled to stand with an assembled universe before the dread Tribunal? Then will the books be opened, the secrets of all hearts disclosed, the hidden things of darkness brought to light. Then shall each one who has trampled upon the Divine Law, rejected the only Mediator, and done despite to the Spirit of grace, stand forth in his true colours, stripped of the disguise with which he imposed upon his fellow creatures. "The Heaven shall reveal his iniquity and the earth shall rise up against him" (Job 20:27). They will be speechless with guilt, utterly overwhelmed, unable to "stand in the judgment" (Psa. 1:5).

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). The Speaker is the Lord Jesus yet not as presenting Himself as the Saviour of sinners, but rather officiating as their Judge, pronouncing their doom. In this solemn passage our Lord gave plain intimation that He was more than Man, that He is none other than the Arbiter of every man's eternal state, from whose decision there can be no appeal. Amazing, indeed, was the contrast between His lowly appearance and external circumstances and this language of conscious majesty and power. While delivering this sermon on the mount Christ appeared before men's eyes as a Galilean peasant, yet both the tone and tenor of it proclaimed Him to be none other than Immanuel, God mani-

fest in flesh. No wonder we are told that, “when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes” (vv. 28, 29). And it is before this very Judge that both writer and reader must yet appear!

“I never knew you” (v. 23). This does not mean that Christ was totally unacquainted with their persons, that He was not cognizant of their character and conduct. No, rather does it signify that He did not approve of or accept them. When it is said “The LORD *knoweth* the way of the righteous” (Psa. 1:6) it is to be understood that He is pleased with the same. Here, then, is the awful verdict: “I never knew you”; no, not even when you were preaching and working in My name. You may have deceived yourselves and those to whom you ministered, but it was impossible to impose upon Me. In His, “I will *profess* unto them,” He seems to speak ironically: you have professed much, made free use of My name, maintained your standing as leaders in the church—so now hear *My* profession! “I *never* knew you” makes it quite clear they were not such as had fallen from grace, as it also looks back to eternity past: they had *never* been born again, never evangelically repented, never believed *savingly*, and had not been among the favoured company upon whom His approbation rested before the foundation of the world.

“Depart from Me” (Matt. 7:23). Here is the fearful sentence imposed. They may have been highly respected in the churches, but they are objects of abhorrence to the Lord Christ. They frequently had His name on their lips, but since He dwelt not in their hearts they are totally disqualified for the celestial courts. “If the most admired and useful preacher on earth had no better evidence of his conversion than his abilities and success as a preacher, he would preach to others and be himself a castaway” (Thomas Scott). “Depart from Me” is the announcement of their just condemnation. They had been near to Him by their profession and by the position they held in the church, but now they must go to the only place for which they are fitted, which is banishment from the Holy One. Herein we discover the force of that terrible expression “the second death” (Rev. 21:8): it is not extinction of being or the annihilation of the soul, but eternal separation from Christ, alienation from the life of God; it is a being “punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:9), cut off forever from the Bestower of blessing, tormented in the Lake of Fire.

“Ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:23). How different is the Divine estimate from the human! These preachers and leaders pleaded that they had wrought many “wonderful works” but because they had not proceeded from renewed hearts, because they had been done to win the applause of their fellows, rather than for the glory of God, the One who cannot be imposed upon declares they are “works of iniquity.” Ah, my reader, we may look upon and admire the outward show, but the One who will yet judge us “looketh on *the heart*” (1 Sam 16:7), and therefore, “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15)—even the righteousnesses of the natural man are but “filthy rags” in His sight.

Deeds of greatness as we deemed them
He will show us were but sin;
Cups of water we'd forgotten
He will tell us were for Him.

Not only the gross external crimes, but pride and presumption, and the religious performances of hypocrites are “works of iniquity.”

In view of the articles preceding this one there is no need for us to make a lengthy application here. The chief lesson for us to take to heart from the above is the utter insufficiency of the most imposing gifts. Yet how many there are who suppose that the exercise of unusual abilities in the church is evidence of great spirituality. As uncommon natural endowments are by no means always accompanied with moral worth, so the presence of abnormal powers is no proof of regeneration. We must learn to distinguish between the performing of wonderful works and the possession of spiritual graces, for the former is no guarantee of the latter. Showy talents may raise a man above his fellows, even above genuine Christians, but unless he is indwelt by the Spirit of God, what are they worth? "Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries . . . and have not charity (love), I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Then let us search ourselves and see whether or not we have something better than those to whom Christ will yet say, "I never knew you." A principle of holiness within evidenced by a godly walk without is infinitely to be preferred above the power to cast out demons and heal the sick. To commune with God in private is an inestimably grander privilege than to speak with tongues in public.—A.W.P.

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

7. *The Fourth Miracle.*

First, its *background*. It has pleased the Holy Spirit in this instance to provide a somewhat lengthy and complicated one, so it will be the part of wisdom for us to patiently ponder the account He has given of what led up to and occasioned this exercise of God's wonder-working power. Just as a diamond appears to best advantage when placed in a suitable setting, so we are the more enabled to appreciate the works of God when we take note of their connections. This applies equally to His works in creation, in providence and in grace. We are always the losers if we ignore the circumstances which occasion the varied actings of our God. The longer and darker the night, the more welcome the morning's light, and the more acute our need and urgent our situation, the more manifest the hand of Him that relieves and His goodness in ministering to us. The same principle holds good in connection with the Lord's undertaking for our fellows, and if we were not so self-centered we should appreciate and render praise for the one as much as for the other.

2 Kings 3 opens by telling us, "Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not there from" (vv. 1-3). Five things are taught us in these verses about that "abominable thing" which God "hates" and which is the cause of all the suffering and sorrow that is in the world, namely, sin. First, that God Himself personally *observes* our wrongdoing: it was "in the sight of the Lord" that the guilty deeds of Jehoram were performed. How much evil doing is perpetrated secretly and under cover of darkness, supposing none are witness thereto. But though evil doing may be concealed from *human* gaze, it cannot be hidden from the omnipresent One, for "the eyes of the LORD are in every place (by night as well as by day) beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). What curb this ought to place upon us.

Second, that God *records* our evil deeds. Here is a clear case in point. The evil which Jehoram wrought in the sight of the Lord is set down against him, likewise that of his parents before him, and further back still, "the sin of Jeroboam." Unspeakably solemn is this: God not only observes but registers against men every infraction of His Law. They commit iniquity and think little or nothing of it, but the very One who shall yet judge them has noted the same against them. It may all be forgotten by them, but nothing shall fade from what God has written, and when the dead, both small and great, stand before Him the "books" will be opened, and they will be "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). And my reader, there is only one possible way of escape from receiving the awful wages of your sins, and that is to throw down the weapons of your warfare against God, cast yourself at the feet of Christ as a guilty sinner, put your trust in His redeeming and cleansing blood, and God will say, "I have *blotted out*, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions" (Isa. 44:22).

Third, that God recognizes *degrees* in evil doing, for while Jehoram displeased the Lord, yet it is said, "but not like his father and like his mother." Christ declared unto Pilate, "he that delivered Me unto thee (Judas) hath the greater sin" (John 19:11); and again we are told, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three wit-

nesses: of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God” (Heb. 10:28, 29). There are many who ignore this principle and suppose that since they are sinners it makes no difference how much wickedness they commit. They madly argue, “I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb,” but are only “treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5), for “every transgression and disobedience” will yet receive “a just recompense of reward” (Heb. 2:2).

Fourth, that God observes whether our reformation be *partial* or complete. This comes out in the fact that we are told Jehoram “put away the image (or statue) that his father had made,” but he did not destroy it, and a few years later Baal worship was restored. God’s Word touching this matter was plain: “thou shalt utterly overthrow them and quite break down their images” (Exo. 23:24). Sin must be dealt with by no unsparing hand, and when we resolve to break therefrom we must “burn our boats behind us” or they are likely to prove an irresistible temptation to return unto our former ways. Fifth, that God duly notes our *continuance* in sin, for it is here recorded of Jehoram that he not only “cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam” but also that “he departed not therefrom” which greatly aggravated his guilt. To enter upon a course of wrong-doing is horrible wickedness, but to deliberately persevere therein is much worse. How few heed that word “break off thy sin by righteousness” (Dan. 4:27).

“And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel” (2 Kings 3:4, 5). In fulfillment of Balaam’s prophecy (Num. 24:17) David had conquered the Moabites so that they became his servants (2 Sam. 8:2), and they continued in subjection to the kingdom of Israel until the time of its division, when their vassalage and tribute were transferred to the kings of Israel, as those of Edom remained to the kings of Judah. But upon the death of Ahab they revolted. Therein we behold the Divine Providence crossing his sons in their affairs. This rebellion on the part of Moab should be regarded in the light of, “when a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7)—but when our ways displease Him, evil from every quarter menaces us. Temporal as well as spiritual prosperity depends entirely upon God’s blessing. To make His hand more plainly apparent God frequently punishes the wicked after the similitude of their sins. He did so to Ahab’s sons—having turned from the Lord—Moab was moved to rebel against them.

Having dwelt upon the Divine side of Moab’s revolt, let us offer one remark upon the human side. As we ponder this incident we are made to realize that “there is no new thing under the sun.” Discontent and strife, jealousy and bloodshedding, have characterized the relations of one nation to another all through history. Instead of mutual respect and peace, “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Titus 3:3) have marked them all through the piece. How aptly were the great empires of antiquity symbolized by “four great *beasts*” (Dan. 7:4-7)—and wild, ferocious and cruel ones, at that! Human depravity is a solemn reality, and neither education nor legalization can eradicate or sublimate it. What, then, are the ruling powers to do? Deal with it with a *firm* hand: “For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil . . . he beareth not the sword in vain: for he (the governmental and civil ruler) is the minister of God (to maintain law and order), a reven-

ger (to enforce law and order) upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:4)—to strike terror into them, and not pamper—to punish the lawbreaker—not attempt to reform him.

"And it came to pass when Ahab was dead that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel" (2 Kings 3:5). The Moabites were the descendants of the son which Lot had by his elder daughter. They occupied a territory to the southeast of Judah and east of the Red Sea. They were a strong and fierce people—"the mighty men of Moab" (Exo. 15:15). Balak—who sent for Balaam to curse Israel—was one of their kings. Even as proselytes they were barred from entering the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation. They were idolaters (1 Kings 11:33). For the space of no less than a hundred and fifty years they had apparently paid a heavy annual tribute, but upon the death of Ahab they had decided to throw off the yoke and be fined no further.

"And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel" (2 Kings 3:6). There was no turning to the Lord for counsel and help. He was the One who had given David success and brought the Moabites into subjection, and unto Him ought Jehoram to have turned now that they rebelled. But he was a stranger to Jehovah; nor did he consult the priests of the calves, so that apparently he had no confidence in them. How sad is the case of the unregenerate in the hour of need; no Divine Comforter in sorrow, no unerring Counsellor in perplexity, no sure Refuge when danger menaces them. How much men lose even in this life by turning their backs upon the One who gave them being. Nothing less than spiritual madness can account for the folly of those who "observe lying vanities" and "forsake their own mercies" (Jonah 2:8). Jonah had to learn that lesson in a hard school. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows never learn it, as they ultimately discover to their eternal undoing. Will that be the case with you, my reader?

"And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle" (2 Kings 3:7). Both Thomas Scott and Matthew Henry suppose that it was merely a political move on the part of Jehoram when he "put away the image of Baal that his father had made." That this external reformation was designed to pave the way for obtaining the help of Jehoshaphat, who was a God-fearing, though somewhat vacillating man. The words of Elisha to him in verses 13, 14 certainly seem to confirm this view, for the servant of God made it clear that he was not deceived by such a device and addressed him as one who acted the part of a hypocrite. Any student of history is well aware that many religious improvements have been granted by governments simply from what is termed "State policy" rather than from spiritual convictions or a genuine desire to promote the glory of God. Only the One who looks on the heart knows the real motives behind much that appears fair on the surface.

"And he said I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses" (v. 7). It seems strange that such an one as Jehoshaphat was willing to unite with Jehoram in this expedition, for he had been severely rebuked on an earlier occasion for having "joined affinity with Ahab" (2 Chron. 18:1-3), for Jehu the Prophet said unto him, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD" (2 Chron. 19:2). How, then, is his conduct to be explained on this occasion? No doubt his zeal to heal the breach between the two kingdoms had much to do with it, for 2 Chronicles 18:1-3 intimates he was anxious to promote a better spirit between Judah and Israel. Moreover, the Moabites were a common enemy, for we learn from 2 Chronicles 20:1 that at a later date the Moabites, accompa-

nied by others, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. But it is most charitable to conclude that Jehoshaphat was deceived by Jehoram's reformation. Yet we should mark the absence of his seeking directions from the Lord on this occasion.

Second, its *urgency*. "And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom. So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" (2 Kings 3:8-10). We must abbreviate our remarks. Note that Jehoram was quite willing for the king of Judah to take the lead, and that he made his plans without seeking counsel of God. The course he took was obviously meant to secure the aid of the Edomites, but by going so far into the wilderness they met with a desert wherein was no water. Thus the three kings and their forces were in imminent danger of perishing. This struck terror into the heart of Jehoram and at once his guilty conscience smote him—unbelievers know enough of the Truth to condemn them! "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD" (Prov. 19:3)—what an illustration of that is furnished by the words of Jehoram on this occasion.

"But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a Prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him" (2 Kings 3:11-12). Here we see the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous in a time of dire calamity: the one is tormented with a guilty conscience and thinks only of the Lord's wrath; the other has hope in His mercy. In those days the Prophet was the Divine mouthpiece, so for one the king of Judah made inquiry; and not in vain. It is blessed to observe that as the Lord takes note of and registers the sins of the reprobate, so He observes the deeds of His elect, placing on record here the humble service which Elisha had rendered to Elijah—not even a cup of water given to one of His little ones shall pass unnoticed and unrewarded! Appropriately was Elisha termed "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 13:14)—their true *defense* in the hour of danger; and to him did the three kings turn in their urgent need.

Third, its *discrimination*. "And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father and to the prophets of thy mother" (2 Kings 3:13). Mark both the dignity and fidelity of God's servant. So far from feeling flattered because the king of Israel consulted him, he deemed himself insulted and hesitated not to let him know he discerned his true character. It reminds us of the Lord's words through Ezekiel, "These men have set up their idols in their hearts and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by *them*?" (14:3). "And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab," (2 Kings 3:13), as much as to say, "Do not disdain me: our case is desperate." "And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee" (v. 14). Little do the unrighteous realize how much they owe, under God, to the presence of the righteous in their midst—as soon as Lot was removed from Sodom that city was destroyed!

Fourth, its *requirement*. “But now bring me a minstrel” (v. 15). In view of 1 Samuel 16:23, Thomas Scott and Matthew Henry conclude that his interview with Jehoram had perturbed Elisha’s mind and that soothing music was a means to compose his spirit, that he might be prepared to receive the Lord’s mind. Possibly they are correct, yet we believe there is another and more important reason. In the light of such passages as, “Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp and the voice of a psalm” (Psa. 98:5), and “Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD” (1 Chron. 25:3 and cf. v. 1), we consider that Elisha was here showing regard for and rendering submission to *the order* established by God. The Hebrew word for “minstrel” signifies “one who plays on a stringed instrument”—as an accompaniment to the Psalm he sang. Thus it was to honour God and instruct these kings that Elisha sent for the minstrel. “And it came to pass *when* the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD (cf. Ezek. 1:3; 3:22) came upon him” (2 Kings 3:15)—the Lord ever honours those who honour Him.

Fifth, its *testing*. “And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts” (vv. 16, 17). A pretty severe test was this, when all outward sign of fulfillment was withheld. It was a trial of their faith and obedience, and entailed a considerable amount of hard work. Had they treated the Prophet’s prediction with derision, they would have scorned to go to so much trouble. It was somewhat like the order Christ gave unto His Apostles as He bade them make the multitudes “sit down” when there was nothing commensurate in sight to feed so vast a company—only a few loaves and fishes. The sequel shows they heeded Elisha and made due preparation for the promised supply of water. As Matthew Henry says, “They that expect God’s blessings must prepare room for them.”

Sixth, its *meaning*. The very number of this miracle helps us to apprehend its significance. It was the fourth of the series, and in the language of Scripture numerics it stands for the earth—cf. the four “seasons” and the four points of the compass, etc. What we have in this miracle is one of the Old Testament foreshadowments that the Gospel was not to be confined to Palestine but would yet be sent forth throughout the earth. Prior to His death Christ bade His Apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5, 6 and cf., John 4:9); but after His resurrection He said, “Go ye therefore and teach *all* nations” (Matt. 28:19). But there is more here. “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22), and “their debtors” we Gentiles are (Rom. 15:26, 27). Strikingly is this typified here, for it was solely for the sake of the presence of Jehoshaphat this miracle was wrought and that the water of life was made available for the Samaritans and the Edomites! Thus it is a picture of the minister of the Gospel engaged in *missionary* activities that is here set forth.

Seventh, its *timing*. “And it came to pass in the morning when the meat offering was offered up, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water” (2 Kings 3:20). This hour was chosen by the Lord for the performing of this miracle to intimate to the whole company that their deliverance was vouchsafed on the ground of the sacrifices offered and the worship rendered in the temple in Jerusalem. It was at the same significant hour that Elijah had made his effectual prayer on Mount Carmel, (1 Kings 8:36), when another notable miracle was wrought. So, too, it was at the hour “of the evening oblation” that a signal blessing was granted unto Daniel (9:21). Typically, it

teaches us that it is through the merits of the sacrifice of Christ that the life-sustaining Gospel of God now flows forth unto the Gentiles.—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

8. *Its Safeguards.*

In the foregoing volume we devoted four articles to a setting forth of the principal springs from which the final perseverance of the saints (in their cleaving unto the Lord, their love of the Truth, and their treading the path of obedience) does issue, or the grounds on which their eternal security rests. It is therefore fitting, if the balance of Truth is to be duly observed by us, that we should give equal space unto a presentation of some of the safeguards by which God has hedged about this doctrine, thereby forbidding empty professors and presumptuous Antinomians from trespassing upon this sacred ground. We have already dwelt upon five of these safeguards and we now proceed to point out others. In such a day as this it is the more necessary to enter into detail upon the present branch of our subject that the mouths of certain enemies of the Truth may be closed, that formalists may be shown they have no part or lot in the matter, that hyper-Calvinists may be instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly, and His own people stirred out of their lethargy.

6. By insisting on the necessity for *using the means of grace*. There are some who assert that if God has regenerated a soul he is infallibly certain of reaching Heaven whether or no he uses the means appointed, yea that no matter to what extent he fails in the performance of duty or how carnally he lives, he cannot perish. Now we have no hesitation in saying that such an assertion is a grievous perversion of the Truth, and in view of Satan's words to Christ, "If Thou be the Son of God cast Thyself down (from a pinnacle of the temple), for it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up" (Matt. 4:6), there is no room for doubt as to who is the author of such a lie. It is a grievous perversion because a tearing asunder of what God Himself has joined together. The same One who has decreed the end has also ordained the means necessary unto that end. He has promised certain things unto His people, but He requires to be inquired of concerning them; and if they have not, it is because they ask not.

Even among those who would turn away with abhorrence from the extreme form of Antinomianism mentioned above, there are those who regard the use of means quite indifferently in this connection, arguing that whatever be required in order to preserve from apostasy the Lord Himself will attend unto, that He will so work in His people both to will and to do of His good pleasure that it is quite unnecessary for ministers of the Gospel to be constantly addressing exhortations unto them and urging to the performance of duty. But such a conclusion is thoroughly defective and erroneous, for it quite loses sight of the fact that God deals with His people throughout as moral agents, enforcing their responsibility. Whether or not we can see the consistency between the Divine foreordination and the discharge of human accountability, between the Divine decree and the imperativeness of our making use of the means of grace, is entirely beside the point. Christ exhorted and admonished His Apostles, and they in turn the churches; and that is sufficient. It is vain to pit our puny objections against their regular practice.

Just as God has ordained material means for the accomplishment of His pleasure in the material realm, so He has appointed that rational agents shall use spiritual means for the fulfilling of His will in connection with spiritual things. He could make the fields fertile and the trees fruitful without the instrumentality of rain and sunshine, but it has pleased Him to employ secondary causes and subordinate agents in the production of our

food. In like manner He could cause His people to grow in grace, make them fruitful unto every good work, and preserve them from everything injurious to their welfare, without requiring any industry and diligence on their part; but it has not so pleased Him to dispense with their concurrence. Accordingly we find Him bidding them, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), "*Labour* therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). Promises and precepts, exhortations and threats, suitable to moral agents are given to them, calling for the employment of those faculties and the exercise of those graces which He has bestowed upon them.

It is a serious mistake to suppose that there is any conflict between one class of passages which contain God's promises of sufficient grace unto His people, and another class in which He requires of them the performance of their duty. In his exposition of Hebrews 3:14 John Owen pointed out that the force of the Greek rendered "if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" denotes "our utmost endeavour to hold it fast and to keep it firm and steadfast"; adding, "Shaken it will be, opposed it will be, kept it will *not be*, without our utmost diligence and endeavour. It is true our persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavour is such an indispensable means for that end that *without it*, it will *not be* brought about." Our diligent endeavour is necessitated by the precept which God commands us to make use of, and by the order He has established in the relations of one spiritual thing to another.

The older writers were wont to illustrate the consistency between God's purpose and our performance of duty by an appeal to Acts 27. The ship which carried the Apostle and other prisoners encountered a fearful gale and it continued so long and with such severity that the inspired narrative declares, "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (v. 20). A Divine messenger then assured the Apostle, "Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and to you God hath given thee all (the lives of) them that sail with thee," and so sure was the Apostle that this promise would be fulfilled, he said unto the ship's company, "Be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but of the ship, for I believe that it shall be even as it was told me" (vv. 22-25). Yet next day, when the sailors feared they would be smashed upon the rocks and started to flee out of the ship, Paul said to the centurion, "except these abide in the ship, ye *cannot be saved*" (v. 31)!

Now *there* is a nice problem which we would submit to the more extreme Calvinists: how can the positive promise, "there shall be no loss of life" (v. 24) and the contingent "except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved" (v. 31) stand together? How are you going to reconcile them according to your principles? But in reality there is no difficulty: God made no absolute promise that He would preserve those in the ship regardless of their use of appropriate means. They were not irrational creatures He would safeguard, but moral agents who must discharge their own responsibility, and neither be inert nor act presumptuously. Accordingly we find Paul bidding his companions "take meat," saying "This is for your health" (v. 34), and later the ship was lightened of its cargo (v. 38) and its main-sail hoisted (v. 40), which further conduced to their safety. The certainty of

God's promise was not suspended upon their remaining in the ship, but it was a making known of the means whereby God would effect their security.

Reverting to Owen's exposition of Hebrews 3:14, he said: "Our persistency in our subsistence in Christ is the emergence and effect of our acting grace unto that purpose. Diligence and endeavours in this matter are like Paul's mariners when he was shipwrecked at Melita. The preservation of their lives depended absolutely on the faithfulness and power of God, yet when the mariners began to fly out of the ship Paul tells the centurion that unless his men stayed therein they could not be saved. But why need he think of the shipmen when God took upon Himself the preservation of them all? He knew full well that He would preserve them; but yet that He would do so in and by the use of *means*. If we are in Christ, God has given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon Himself, in His covenant, the preservation of them. But yet we may say, with reference unto the means that He hath appointed, when storms and trials arise, *unless* we use our own diligent endeavours we cannot be saved." Alas that some who profess to so greatly admire this Puritan and endorse his teachings have wandered so far from the course which he followed.

If it be asked, Did the purpose of God that Paul and his companions should all reach land safely depend upon the uncertain will and actions of men? The answer is, No, as a cause from which the purpose of God received its strength and support. But Yes, as a means, appointed by Him, to secure the end He had ordained, for God has decreed the subordinate agencies by which the end shall be accomplished as truly as He has decreed the end itself. In His Word, God has revealed a conjunction of means and ends, and there is a necessity lying upon men to use the means and not to expect the end without them. It is at our peril that we tear asunder what God has joined together and disrupt the order He has appointed. The same God who bids us believe His promises, forbids us to tempt His providences (Matt. 4:7). Even though the means may appear to us to have no adequate connection with the end, seeing God has enjoined them, we must use the same. Naaman must wash in the Jordan if he would be cleansed of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:10) and Hezekiah must take a lump of figs and lay it on his boil if he is to be recovered (2 Kings 20:4-7).

They are greatly mistaken who suppose that since the preservation of believers is guaranteed in the Covenant of Grace that this renders all means and motives, exhortations and threats, useless and senseless. Not so. The doctrine of the everlasting security of the saint does not mean that God will preserve him whether or no he perseveres, but rather that He has promised to give him all needed grace for him to continue in the path of holiness. This supposes that believers will be under such advantages and have suitable aids used with them in order to this, and that they shall have motives constantly set before them which induce and persuade unto obedience and personal piety and to guard them against the contrary. Hence the propriety and usefulness of the ordinances of the Gospel, the instructions and precepts, the promises and incentives which are furnished us to perseverance without which the purpose of God that we should persevere could not be effected in a way suited to our moral nature.

Christians are indeed "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5), yet it needs to be pointed out that they are not preserved mechanically, as a child is kept in the nursery from falling into the fire by a tall metal fender or guard, or as the unwilling horse is held in by bit and bridle; but spiritually so by the workings of Divine grace in them and by

means of motives and inducements from without which call forth that grace into exercise and action. We quite miss the force of that declaration unless we complete the verse: "Who are kept by the power of God *through faith*, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." It is not "for" or "because of faith" but "through faith" yet not without it, for faith is the hand which, from a sense of utter insufficiency and helplessness, clings to God and grasps His strength—not always firmly, but often feebly—not always consciously, but instinctively. Though the saint be "kept by the power of God" yet he himself has to fight every step of the way. If we read of "this *grace* wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:2), we are also told "for by *faith* ye stand" (2 Cor. 1:24).

Viewing the event from the standpoint of the Divine decree it was not possible that Herod should slay Christ in His infancy, nevertheless God commanded Joseph to use means to prevent it, by fleeing into Egypt. In like manner, from the standpoint of God's eternal purpose it is not possible that any saint should perish, yet He has placed upon him the necessity of using means to prevent apostasy and everything which has a tendency thereto. True, he must not trust in the means to the exclusion of God, for those means are only efficacious by His appointment and blessing; on the other hand, it is presumption and not faith which talks of trusting God while the means are despised or ignored. **Nor have we said anything in this article** which warrants the inference that Heaven is a wage that we earn by our own industry and fidelity, rather do the means appointed by God mark out the course we must take if we would reach the desired Goal. It is "*through faith and patience*" we "inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12): our glorification will not be bestowed in return for them, yet there can be no glorification to those devoid of these graces.

The sun shines into our rooms *through* their windows: those windows contribute nothing whatever to our comfort and enjoyment of the sun, yet are they necessary as means for its beams to enter. The means and mediums which God has deigned for the accomplishment of His ends concerning us are not such as to be "conditions" on which those ends are suspended in uncertainty as to their issue, but are the sore links by which He has connected the one with the other. Exhortations and warnings are not so much the means whereby God's promises are accomplished as the means by which the *things* promised are wrought. God has promised His people sufficient grace to enable and cause them to make such a use of the means that they will be preserved from fatal sins or apostasy, and the exhortations, consolations, admonitions of Scripture are designed for the stirring up into exercise of that grace. The certainty of the end is assured not by the nature or sufficiency of the means in themselves considered, but because of God's ordination in connection therewith.

God has assured His people that His grace shall be all-sufficient and that His strength shall be made perfect in their weakness, but nowhere has He promised a continuance of His love and favour unto dogs returning to their vomit or to sows which are content to wallow in the mire. If our thoughts on this subject be formed entirely by the teaching of God's Word (and not partly by carnal reason), then we shall expect perseverance only in that wherein God has promised it, and that is by availing ourselves of the helps and advantages He has provided, especially the study of and meditation upon His Word and the hearing or reading the messages of His servants. Though God has promised grace unto His people, yet He requires them to—sincerely, believingly, earnestly—seek it: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find

grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). And that grace we are constantly in need of as long as we are left here—“Day by day the manna fell,” O to learn that lesson well.

Much confusion has resulted on this and other points through failure to distinguish between implication and application, or what Christ purchased for His people and God’s actually making over the same unto them according to the order of things He has established. As faith is indispensable before justification so is perseverance before glorification, and that necessarily involves the use of means. True, our faith adds nothing whatever to the merit of Christ in order to our justification, yet until we *believe* we are under the curse of the Law; nor does our perseverance entitle us to glorification, yet only those who *do* persevere unto the end will be glorified. Now as God requires obedience from all the parts and faculties of our souls, so in His Word He has provided motives to the obedience required, motives suited unto “all that is within us”—that love, fear, hope, etc., may be called into action of ourselves—we are not sufficient to make a good use of the means, and therefore we beg God to work in us that which He requires: Colossians 1:29.

God has promised to repair the spiritual decays of His people and to heal their backslidings freely, yet He will do so in such a way as wherein He may communicate His grace righteously to the praise of His glory. Therefore are duties, especially that of confession of sins to God, prescribed to us in order thereto. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). “I will heal their backsliding” (Hosea 14:4): there is the promise and the end. But first “Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously” (v. 2): there is the duty and the means unto that end. Although repentance and confession be not the procuring cause of God’s grace and love, from where alone our healing or recovery proceeds, yet are they required in the appointed method of God’s dispensing His grace.

It must be insisted upon that the Christian’s concurrence with the Divine will by no means warrants the horrible conclusion that he is entitled to divide the honours with God. How could this possibly be, seeing that if he does what he is bidden he remains but an “unprofitable servant”? How could it be, when to whatever extent he does improve the means, it is only the power of Divine grace which so enabled him? How could it be, when he is most sensible in himself that far more of failure than success attends his efforts? No, when the redeemed have safely crossed the Jordan and are safely landed on the shores of the heavenly Canaan they will exclaim with one accord, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, for Thy Truth’s sake” (Psa. 115:1).

To sum up. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, in the pursuit and practice of holiness as it is set forth in God’s Word, provides no shelter for either laziness or licentiousness: it supplies no encouragement for us to take our regeneration and glorification for granted, but bids us “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Exhortations and threats are not made unto us as those already assured of final perseverance, but as those who are called to the use of means for the establishment of our souls in the ways of obedience, being annexed to those ways of grace and peace which God calls His saints unto. Perseverance consists in a continual exercise of spiritual graces in the saints, and exhortations are the Divinely appointed means for stirring those graces into action and for a further increase of them. Therefore those preachers who do not press upon the Lord’s people the discharge of their duties and are remiss in warning

and admonishing them, fail grievously at one of the most vital points in the charge committed to them.—A.W.P.

THE DESTRUCTION OF DAGON. (SERIES PART 1)

The opening chapters of the first book of Samuel bring before us some sad incidents, making evident the deplorable condition into which the favoured Nation had fallen, for they treat of a portion of that time covered by the Book of Judges, when “in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (21:25). First, we have Hannah, in bitterness of soul praying unto and weeping before the Lord, and Eli the high priest so lacking in discernment as to suppose she was drunk (Chap. 1). Concerning Eli’s sons we read that they were “sons of Belial” who “knew not the LORD” (2:12). Though engaged in the sacred office of the priesthood, they conducted themselves in a most horrible manner. First, we are told that they misappropriated for their own use portions of the sacrifices, for they “abhorred the offering of the LORD” (2:13-17), thereby being guilty of the fearful sin of sacrilege. Moreover, they committed immorality, and that at the very “door of the tabernacle” (2:22). Later, we find the Lord making known unto their father (2:27-34) and unto Samuel (3:11-14) the judgment which He would execute upon the house of Eli.

“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men” (1 Sam. 4:1-2). Jehovah was no longer fighting for His people, and without Him they suffered defeat at the hands of the enemy. The Lord will not show Himself strong on the behalf of those who displease and dishonour Him. As He announced through one of His Prophets at a later date, “The LORD is with you while ye be with Him: and if ye seek Him He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you” (2 Chron. 15:2). The same principle is repeated in the New Testament: James 4:8-10.

“And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies” (1 Sam 4:3). See here the blindness and the folly of the religious leaders. They were oblivious to the fact that the nation was ripe for judgment, and refused to consider that the defeat which had just been experienced was a call from the Lord unto humiliation, repentance and reformation. How absurd the expedient suggested. True, wonders had indeed happened in the past when the ark had gone before the people, but it had been by the Divine command the sacred coffer was in the vanguard, and not at the caprice of men. Tokens of the Lord’s power were granted at a time when the nation, generally speaking, was walking in obedience to Him, and not when He was being openly defied. Those things made all the difference.

The expedient resorted unto by those “elders” has often been repeated in principle. There has usually been a large proportion of those who nominally profess to be the people of God, that are so deluded as to believe no matter how sinful and worldly their lives be, they are entitled unto Divine help. Total strangers to vital godliness, supposing that a half-hearted attention to external forms will satisfy the Lord, in the hour of emergency they call upon Him in hope. To indulge the conceit because a “day of prayer” is appointed for a people who are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4), He will promptly put forth His mighty arm on their behalf, is the modern parallel to Is-

rael's making an idol of the ark and concluding it would save them from their enemies. Rightly did Thomas Scott say of those hypocrites, they "dishonoured Him more in attending of His ordinances than they could do by neglecting them, so that He abhors those services for which they expect His favour." Let the reader ponder such passages as Isaiah 29:13-14; Malachi 1:12-14.

"So the people sent to Shiloh (where the tabernacle then abode) that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of Hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God" (1 Sam. 4:4). What a spectacle: that which symbolized the throne of Jehovah in Israel's midst being borne by these sons of Belial! But have no unholy men handled the sacred things of Christ during the past fifty years? Are there no Hophnies and Phinehases in Christendom today? Are the Scriptures never publicly read, prayers made, the ordinances of Christian Baptism and the Lord's Supper administered, by men whose beliefs and ways evince that they "abhor the offering of the Lord"? Well did Thomas Scott say of Eli's sons, "being hardened to their destruction, they were left to venture presumptuously into the holy of holies and to carry the ark into the army and thus, without any proper call, they were found within the reach of the sword of the Philistines, by which they were destined to be destroyed."

"And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again" (v. 5). How much seeming zeal there is for the ark of the Lord while the Lord of the ark is despised! Poor deluded souls; like parched travelers in the desert having false hopes raised by a mirage of water. Mistaking the shadow for the substance, they thought that all would now be well with them. Their shouting was but the infatuation of the flesh and not an inspiration of the Spirit. It went beyond what our moderns would term "wishful thinking": it was heralding the victory before the enemy was so much as engaged. Carried away by an act of awful presumption they gave expression to hilarious joy as though they had already triumphed over the Philistines. Has mankind become any wiser with the passing of the centuries? Is our own "enlightened generation" too discreet to count their chickens before they are hatched? It hardly looks like it with all this ambitious and utopian post-war planning.

"And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp: And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore" (vv. 6, 7). Such ignorance and superstition was excusable on the part of the Philistines. They had heard something of the wonders which the God of Israel had wrought for His people in the past, and as they listened to the acclamations of the Hebrews they were filled with dismay. But not for long. Their leaders called upon them to, "Be strong and quit you like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men and fight" (v. 9). It was not the "fear of the Lord" but only a fleeting natural alarm which had overtaken them, and they quickly threw it off. Had Jehovah actually been with Israel how different things would have been.

"And the Philistines fought and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man to his tent: and there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain"

(vv. 10, 11). Israel had regarded the ark as a fetish—as many now consider a meaningless “mascot” or a golden “cross” which has been “blest” by some Papist, will afford its possessor protection in the hour of danger—but it availed them not when the enemy struck. They had given a premature shout of victory, but now their army suffered a sevenfold worse defeat than the previous one. The sons of the high priest had personally accompanied the sacred coffer, and now they lay cold in death. God’s threats are not idle words, but sure predictions of what is in store for evil-doers. The fearful judgments which had been announced to Eli and Samuel were now literally executed. And, my reader, each of us, individually, and the nation to which we belong, has to do with the same God. He will not be mocked with impunity. Though He be slow to anger, yet His wrath is the more terrible when it does strike.

Tidings of this fearful disaster were speedily conveyed unto the high priest. He was seated by the wayside in sore suspense, “For his heart trembled for the ark of God” (v. 13). When the news was broken to him, it was too much for the aged Eli, so that he “fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate and his neck was broken and he died” (v. 18). His daughter-in-law was in childbirth and when she learned of the national catastrophe and the death of her father-in-law and husband, she, too, expired, but not until after naming her son “Ichabod” saying “the glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken” (vv. 19-22). It may strike some as strange that God suffered the ark to fall into the hands of the Philistines, but considering all the circumstances it had surely been much more strange had His *blessings* attended the superstitious expediency of the rebellious Israelites.—A.W.P.

WELCOME TIDINGS.

“And it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands were heavy: and thy took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (Exo. 17:11, 12). From earliest times the Lord’s people have looked upon this as an example of the efficacy of importunate prayer. Rightly so, we believe. In fact the Chaldee paraphrase of verse 11 actually expresses it, “when Moses held up his hand in prayer.” But more: this incident supplies a blessed illustration of a servant of God being upheld in his work by the instrumentality of others. Even the Apostle Paul recognized his need of the saints’ help in this direction, for again and again we find him asking for their prayers on his behalf.

During the past few months an unusual number of letters from readers of this magazine, many of whom we have never met in the flesh (though undoubtedly we have contacted them in spirit before the Throne of Grace), have made mention that they pray daily for the editor and his wife. This is a great encouragement to us, and we trust we are duly grateful for the same. How much we owe personally to their supplications, and to what extent the fruitfulness of this written ministry is due thereto, only the Day will declare. Certain we are that if it had not been for the co-operation and help of our spiritual partners, this publication had ceased long ago. Prayer is one of the Divinely-appointed channels through which the blessings of Heaven flow down to this earth.

Once again it is our privilege and pleasure to give our friends some indication of how the Lord has graciously heard their prayers on our behalf, and how He has deigned to make this little monthly messenger a help to some of His scattered sheep in this dark day. Only a few extracts are possible from the letters received. May they encourage all of us and stimulate unto more earnest and definite intercession.

“We are rejoicing before the Lord in still preserving to us such a faithful witness and ministry in these times of spiritual decay. We have to praise His great name for thus providing food convenient for our souls. He does indeed feed us with the finest of the wheat. It is cause for humbling ourselves before Him, that He should deign still to remember us so lovingly, notwithstanding our backsliding and our utter unworthiness. He continually reminds us it is not for anything in us, but simply to promote His own honour and glory, and we can truly realize this when we look within and behold what manner of creeping things we are, in contrast with what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (Australia). “Thank you very much for sending me the magazines so regularly. They have searched me and refreshed me” (Scotland). “We are thankful to receive the Studies and the teaching that is in them and that the great sins of our own day are taken notice of” (New reader).

“Many thoughts in your Studies help me and give comfort, some frighten me, nevertheless I look forward for your magazine coming. So far I have received all copies” (Australia). “Your magazine has been blessed to me. Often I have felt as if I were not in God’s mind at all: everything seemed to be against me. Then I would find something in them that would clear the mist away and I would feel so happy, for things did not seem so bad after all (Aged Pilgrim). “Please find enclosed a small token of my appreciation for the Studies throughout another year. To me they have been a real help and blessing, while very often, too, they have caused heart searchings” (One in the Navy).

“When the Studies come in such a wonderful way it would be a very dull heart that failed to return thanks and praise to Him to whom all praise belongs. He doeth all things well. I know of no one around here with whom I can have fellowship in spiritual things. The ‘Doctrine of Man’s Impotency’ was not altogether pleasant reading, but I am thankful you had the courage to take it up. The dignity of man has been preached for so long that we needed a reminder of what by nature we really are. Your Studies stir me up to make more diligent use of the means of grace and to seek more earnestly those things that belong to my peace” (Australia). “I continue to find the Studies very helpful, and experience a blessing in perusing their pages. Nothing I have ever read has revealed my shortcomings in the life of grace more than your writings. May the Lord whom you try to serve bless your labours in these dark days. We know not what lies ahead, but the Lord changeth not, and in Him lies our only hope as individuals and as a nation. I wonder if it is a mark of grace when one seeks and searches to make still more and more sure that one’s feet are on the Rock? To whom can we go except to Him who has the Words of Eternal Life? O to be sure that I had a saving interest and covenant right in Him” (Scotland). O that there were more who sought to make sure.

“We are still not only enjoying but profiting from your Studies. You are certainly making a great contribution to the edifying of the saints. Your numerous quotations from the writings of the Puritans are making many conscious of the real value of their works. I know that for my own part their writings are having a great influence on my ministry” (Young Preacher). “I am glad you are able to continue the publication of your Studies, which are always illuminating and spiritually profitable” (Anglican Minister). “Thank you for your Studies during 1942. Your writings have helped me more than I can say, and I very seldom speak in public without drawing on them for some of their good things” (England).

“I do appreciate the Studies and trust you are able to continue. I read them more than anything else, and am not able to convey to you how much help they have been to me from time to time. Only yesterday I spent hours reading your expositions. It was the Lord’s Day, and often I am quite alone and never go outdoors. I do not want to seem as if I am better than others, but O I am very much alone in spiritual matters! Although I have quite a lot of Christian friends, it is a rare thing if they ever speak of Scriptural topics” (Canada). “How glad I am to be able to send a tiny gift towards the printing of the magazine. They are indeed most helpful and seem to become more so than ever as the years go by. They contain just that which one’s soul longs for, but at the same time it reveals to my own heart, at any rate, the empty teaching of today. Were it not that one has the precious Word of God to go to at all times, I don’t know what I should do” (England).

“I want to express to you again my deep gratitude for the spiritual instruction, counsel and blessing your ministry has been to me through another year. May God richly bless you both and grant you the needed strength and wisdom for the task which lies before you. O that there was more such ministry in the world today! Many thanks, too, for the extra copies you have been sending. I appreciate them much and have forwarded them to a poor but worthy family in the northern part of our state” (U.S.A.). “Truly I have to confess that the Studies have been the means from the Lord in sustaining my soul many a time. After I read them, I always want to go back to them, and am seldom, if ever, disappointed in getting something fresh and good. I thank the Lord that He still has a faithful few in this sinful world who are not ashamed to hold forth the words of Truth. May the

Lord prosper your work greatly for His own glory” (Scotland). “Thank you for the Studies which it has been my privilege, in the mercy of the Lord, to receive during this year. Your choice of subjects has been, I verily believe, God-given, and have been most searching and edifying. ‘Doctrine of Saints Perseverance’ and ‘Christian Resurrection’ have been specially helpful. Thanking the Lord for His gracious care of you both and ever praying that you may be kept to provide that which is truly food for His people in these difficult times” (Wales).

“I feel constrained to write and thank you for the Studies. Every article in them seems to be rich with good wholesome food, and undoubtedly written with the object of producing a good inward constitution capable of digesting the same. The articles on ‘Divine Healing’ appeared, so far as I am concerned, at a particularly suitable time,” (Scotland). “Your articles on Divine Healing have been of much help to me. I could not agree with much of the ‘Divine-healers’ doctrine, yet I could not give the reason why. How I need to thank God for His patience with such a stupid ignorant creature” (U.S.A.). “The reading of your Studies during the past year has been of great blessing and profit to me, and valued far beyond the wealth and riches of the world. To a youth of twenty years of age, living in a grim world at war, with corruption and apostasy all around us, the truths contained in your magazine have been strengthening and confirmed my faith” (Philadelphia).

“Personally, in reading your Studies, I have sometimes been edified, instructed, and encouraged; and at others, searched, reproved, and stirred up to confession and prayer. I trust, therefore, I can without presumption say that they have been to me a source of spiritual teaching and gracious profit. May the Lord continue to bless you with much of His spirit and grace in the work, and favour you with many inward encouragements, as well as outward testimonies, that this ‘labour of love’ is not in vain” (England).

