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SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.

“Nourished up in the Words of Faith” (1 Tim. 4:6). We are living in a day when more and more attention is being paid to dietetics; foods are scientifically analyzed, the various grades of vitamins classified, and a serious effort made to obtain a well-balanced menu. With many the feeding of the body has become a regular fad; alas that so few evidence any concern about the feeding of their souls—that which returns to the dust is pampered, whereas that which returns to God is utterly neglected. Multitudes are filling their minds with trash, while their spirits are being starved. However, it is not to those who ignore their eternal interests that we now address ourselves; rather is it to the professing people of God we desire to offer a few words of instruction.

“Nourished up in the Words of Faith.” The taking of nourishment does not necessarily produce nutrition. Nor is the fault always in what has been eaten—sometimes the most wholesome food yields no good effect because of the condition of the one who consumes it. Various factors enter into real benefit being received from what is eaten. In developing our present theme let us point out, then, four of the things which are essential to nourishment—true alike both in the natural and the spiritual. First there must be a hearty appetite. Second, there must be suitable and wholesome food. Third, there must be proper mastication. Fourth, there must be the blessing of God thereon. No doubt other things are contributing agents, but these four are the primary ones.

First, there must be a *healthy appetite*. One cannot eat to profit when he is sick; nay, at such times, food is usually repulsive. A good appetite is a mark of good health. Now it is true that we cannot bestow upon ourselves a hearty appetite, but we can do much to injure and destroy it. A child who is surfeited with candy has little relish for more wholesome diet; and a child of God who absorbs newspapers and novels, no longer finds the Word sweet to his taste. A person who gives way to strong drink loses his desire for solid food, and the believer who drinks into the spirit of this world will disdain the Heavenly Manna. Many a millionaire, through using up his nervous energy in his hectic quest for wealth, is quite unable to enjoy his meals or even partake of solids; and many a Christian has become so occupied with “service” that his own soul goes unnourished. What a tragedy when we lose our appetite for *spiritual* food.

Second, there must be *suitable food*: “Desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). That is why the Holy Scriptures are given to us—that we may grow in love and reverence for them, increase in the knowledge of them, be more and more regulated by them. It is only by feeding on this Heavenly Manna that strength is obtained for our pilgrim walk, for our warfare with sin and Satan, and for our service unto God and our fellows. To deprive ourselves of food issues in unfitness, weakness, sickness—true alike in the natural and the spiritual. How diligent most of us are in seeing to it that our bodies do not go without their needed food; are we as careful about the nourishment of our souls? Is it not at this very point we discover the explanation as to why so many believers fail to “grow in grace”? and why so many are feeble and useless?

Not only are we diligent in the feeding of our bodies, but most of us are very particular in *what* we eat. We know that poisons are dangerous, that tainted food is harmful, and that many of the patented specialties are but catch-pennies. Alas that so few are equally particular about their mental and spiritual food. Error has the same effect on the soul as

poison does on the body, yet thousands of professing Christians will hear and read heretical men and suppose it will not harm them. And how many substitute the writings of good men for the Word itself? The very best writings of men are but the milk of the Word diluted. Milk direct from the cow is rich and pure; milk from the retailer is often skimmed, and sometimes watered down.

Third, there must be *proper mastication*. Meals which are hurriedly consumed and swallowed almost whole do us little good, and often much harm. A little food well chewed will prove far more beneficial than a larger quantity that is bolted. Our teeth are given us to use. The same is true spiritually; a few verses that are thoughtfully and prayerfully pondered will advantage us far more than two or three whole chapters skimmed through. Meditation stands to reading as mastication (chewing) does to eating. *Regularity* is also essential; we have too much common sense to try and eat enough on the Sabbath to suffice our bodies for the remainder of the week; then why be so foolish in adopting this device to the soul? Time must be found for communion with God even though it means an hour less in bed each night.

In proper mastication the food is duly mixed with our saliva, which is a provision of nature for aiding digestion, and it is the hurried gulping down of our food which prevents this. Now the counterpart of this in connection with spiritual nourishment is, that in order for the Word of God to do us good it must be mixed with *faith*. It was to this fact the Apostle referred when he pointed out how the Gospel was sent unto the Jews of old “but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard” (Heb. 4:2). It is for this reason that in our text the Scriptures are termed “the Word of Faith,” for faith is their chief requirement.

Fourth, there must be *the Divine blessing*. No matter how healthy be our appetite, how wholesome the food we take, how carefully it be masticated—without the smile of God thereon it will profit us nothing. Food does not automatically nourish, any more than seed planted in the ground automatically grows of itself; the one as much as the other is entirely dependent on the Creator’s blessing. If we are in the habit of asking God’s blessing on the material food we eat (and a meal ought never to be taken without so doing), equally essential is it that we beg Him to sanctify unto us our *spiritual* food. What an example the Saviour has left us—“And looking up to Heaven, He *blessed*, and brake, and gave the loaves to His disciples” (Matt. 14:19). Then let us fail not to definitely ask God to bless unto us the Bread of Life—the reading of and meditation upon the Scriptures should ever be preceded by and followed with prayer for God to apply them in power to our hearts.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

11. *The Law and Adultery: Matthew 5:27-33.*

From what has been before us in Matthew 5:21-26, and still more so from the searching and pride-withering declaration of Christ in verse 28, we may perceive again how deeply important is a right understanding of the Divine Law, and what fatal consequences must inevitably follow from inadequate and erroneous views thereof. It is at this point, more than anywhere else, that the orthodoxy and helpfulness of the preacher must be tested, for if he fails here—in his interpretation and enforcement of the strictness and spirituality of the Decalogue—the whole of his teaching must necessarily be fundamentally faulty and injuriously misleading. This is evident from the method followed by Christ in His first public sermon. No matter how deplorable and general be the failure of the modern pulpit, let it be said emphatically that all of us are bound and must yet be judged by the holy Law of God, and no repudiation thereof, no modifying of its high demands by unfaithful preachers, can in any way justify our disobedience to God's commands.

“Whilst we therefore view the strictness, spirituality, and reasonableness of the precepts which we have been reading, as expounded by our Divine Teacher, let us impartially compare our past and present lives, our tempers, affections, thoughts, words, and actions, with this perfect rule. Then we shall find every self-confident hope expire, and plainly perceive that by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God. Then will Christ and His salvation become precious to our souls. Whether we look to our conduct towards those who have injured us, or those whom we have offended; towards our superiors or inferiors, relatives, friends, or servants; the state of our heart or the government of our passions; to what we have, or what we have not done; we shall see cause for humiliation, and need of forgiveness. And when we consider that we must be made holy according to this standard, in order to the enjoyment of God and Heaven, we shall as evidently perceive our need of the powerful influences of the Holy Spirit, and learn to value the ordinances of God, through which that sacred assistance is obtained” (Thomas Scott).

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell” (Matt. 5:29). In this and the following verse our Saviour furnishes heavenly instruction for the avoiding of those offenses against which He had just spoken. It is supplied by Him in the way of answer to a secret objection to the exposition He had given of the Seventh Commandment, wherein He had condemned adultery of heart. Corrupt human nature would be ready to at once murmur, It is impossible to be governed by so exacting a law, it is a hard saying, who can bear it? Flesh and blood cannot but look with pleasure on a beautiful woman, and it is inevitable that there should be lusting after so attractive an object. What, then, shall we do with our eyes, if an unchaste look be so evil and fatal? It was to just such risings up of the depraved heart against the spiritual requirements of a holy God that Christ here made reply.

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.” Here again the language of Christ is not to be taken at its proper sense: that is, it is not to be understood literally. One of the rules in expounding Scripture is that where the literal sense of a verse is against any of the commandments of the Law, then its words must be regarded figuratively, for obviously one part of the Word must not be made to contradict another. Now

just as the Seventh Commandment not only prohibited the physical act of adultery, but also all mental impurity, so the Sixth Commandment not only forbade the taking of life, but also reprehended any deliberate maiming of either our own body or that of our neighbour's. Therefore, no man can without sin pluck out his eye or cut off his hand.

By the "eye" we are to understand, first, the eye of the body, yet not that only but any other thing that is dear to us—the "eye" being one of the most precious of our members. The word "offend" does not here signify to displease, but to hinder: the reference is to anything which occasions us to commit this sin, whatever would cause us to stumble. Thus the figure is easily interpreted: whatever in our walk or ways exposes the soul to the danger of unholy desires, must, at all costs, be abandoned. There must be the uncompromising excision of everything hurtful to the soul. To pluck out the right eye means that we are to rigidly restrain and strictly govern our senses and members, deny ourselves, even though it involve present hindrance, financial loss, and personal pain. No matter how pleasant and dear the presence and use of certain things be to us, yet if they are occasions of sin they must be relinquished and avoided.

Since the Lord Jesus so pointedly condemned unlawful desires and the exercise of impure imaginations, then it is our bounden duty to suppress and disallow them, to strive earnestly against the same, to subdue the lusts from which they spring. Though the senses and members of our bodies be the instruments of evil, yet the sin itself proceeds from the lusts of our hearts, and if *they* be subdued, if every idolized object be renounced within, then there will be no need to either flagellate or mutilate our bodies. On the other hand, if we crucify not the flesh with its affections and lusts, the mere plucking out of an eye or the cutting off a hand will profit the soul nothing. The root of sin lies much deeper than the physical: "Cleanse first that which is *within* the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:26). Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good (Matt. 12:33).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence," etc. (Col. 3:5), not the mortification of our physical "members," but the appetites and passions of the soul. This expresses the same idea as our Lord was propounding. But the subjugation of sexual appetites, the obtaining of victory over such strong desires of the heart, is no easy matter—especially in cases where both constitution and habit have united to enslave in these sins. No, the mortification of such lusts cannot but be attended with most painful exercises and the sacrifice of what has been delighted in and held dear. Nevertheless, though it be as painful as the plucking out of a right eye, it must be done. We are obliged to choose between mortification and damnation, and therefore the strongest corruptions are to be mastered and all that is within us brought into subjection to God and subordinated to the eternal good of our souls.

It is to be observed that this is one of many passages in the Gospels in which we find the Son of God making definite reference to a Future State. How often did He refer to the resurrection of the body, and of a Hell into which the wicked shall be cast! He was continually bringing these things to the attention of men and pressing them upon their serious and solemn consideration. No flesh-pleasing sycophant was He: the glory of God and not the praise of men was ever the object before Him. And herein He has left an example to be followed by all whom He has called to be officers in His kingdom; not to lull to sleep by "smooth speaking," but to declare "the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against

all ungodliness and unrighteousness, of men” (Rom. 1:18). If men and women could be persuaded to weigh with due deliberation the vast importance and endlessness of eternity, and the brevity and uncertainty of this life, they would cease trifling away so many of their swiftly passing hours, and prepare to meet their God.

“For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell.” Christ here emphasizes the fact that lustful looks and wanton dalliances are so disastrous and destructive to the soul that it is better to lose an eye than to yield to this evil and perish eternally in it. This, as we have pointed out, is in reply to the objection that heart adultery is something no man can prevent, that it is beyond his power to resist temptations to gaze with longing eyes upon an attractive woman. Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, “Such pretences as these will scarcely be overcome by reason, and therefore must be argued against with the terrors of the Lord, and so they are here argued against.” Alas, that this powerful deterrent to evil and incitement to holiness is so rarely made use of in our degenerate times, when little else than honey and soothing syrup is being handed out from the pulpit.

Far different was the course followed by the chief of the Apostles. When he stood before Felix, he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” and we are told that the governor “trembled” (Acts 24:25). But what is there in modern preaching—even that known as “Calvinistic”—which is calculated to make sin-hardened souls to tremble? Little wonder that the rising generation defy their parents with such impudence, when their elders are unrestrained by fear of the hereafter. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord (in the previous verse he had spoken of the judgment-seat of Christ), we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11) said the Apostle, and so will every faithful servant of God today. Ministers of the Gospel are required to conduct their hearers to Sinai before they lead them to Calvary, to make known the “severity of God” (Rom. 11:22) as well as His goodness, to declare the reality and awfulness of Hell, as well as the blessedness of Heaven; and if they do not so, then they are unfaithful to their trust, and God will require at their hands the blood of their hearers (Ezek. 33:6; Acts 20:26).

“And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell” (Matt. 5:30). This is the same exhortation as was before us in the preceding verse, the same stern and startling argument to restrain us from the sin of heart adultery. Nor is this to be regarded as a needless multiplying of words, for such repetitions in the Scripture have a particular use, namely, to signify that the things thus delivered are of special importance and worthy of our most careful observation and obedience. There is indeed a slight variation, and what strikes us (though the commentators seem to have missed it) is a designed gradation. As the “eye” was a figure of what is dearest and most cherished by us, so the “hand” is to be understood of what is most useful and profitable. Many have wondered why our Lord did not mention the plucking out of an eye last, as being the severer loss of the two; but it must not be overlooked that He was not here addressing a company of the rich and learned but the common people, and to a *labouring man* the loss of the right hand would be a far more grievous deprivation than an eye!

Nor is it to be overlooked that Christ was here more immediately speaking to His own disciples—this well may startle some today, yet as Andrew Fuller rightly pointed out, “It is necessary for those whom the Lord may know to be heirs of salvation, in certain circumstances, to be threatened with damnation, as a means of preserving them from it.”

Such passages as Romans 11:18-20; Galatians 6:7, 8; Hebrews 10:26-30, are addressed to believers! Mature reflection of our situation in this world, will reconcile us to that self-denying and painful mortification of our sins to which we are indispensably called. We shall see tender mercy couched under the apparent harshness of the requirement—our safety, advantage, and felicity consulted—and the grace and consolations of the Spirit will render it practicable and even comfortable. And would we be preserved from gross iniquities, our hearts must be kept with all diligence, and our eyes and all our senses and faculties forbidden to rove after those things which lead to transgression: the strictest rules of purity and self-denial will be found, by experience, the most conducive to true and solid comfort while in this world” (Thomas Scott).

By these exhortations, then, the Lord Jesus teaches us that we must keep a strict watch over the senses and members of our body, especially the eye and the hand, that they become not the occasions of sinning against God: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13). We must use our sight in obedience to God: “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee” (Prov. 4:25), that is, we are to order our sight according to the rule of the Word, for that is the way wherein we are to walk. The necessity of heeding this Rule appears from many solemn examples. Eve’s looking on the forbidden fruit, contrary to the Divine commandment, was the door of that sin into her heart. Ham was cursed for looking upon his father’s nakedness (Gen. 9); Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back toward Sodom (Gen. 19:26); over 50,000 men of Bethshemesh were slain for looking into the ark of the Lord against His revealed will (1 Sam. 6). Do not these cases tell us clearly that before we look at anything we should pause and ask whether the same will be for God’s glory and our good?

Again—these exhortations of Christ teach us plainly that we must seek diligently to avoid all the occasions of every sin, though it be most painful to ourselves and attended with great temporal loss. As one old writer expressed it, The fallen nature of man is like unto dry wood, which will quickly burn as soon as fire touches it. As mariners at sea set a constant watch to avoid rocks and sand, so should we most warily avoid every occasion to sin. Self must be denied at all costs, constant watch kept over the heart, the first risings of corruption therein suppressed, temptations to sin shunned, the company of those who would be a snare unto us avoided. So there must be a constant seeking unto God for His grace, that we may be enabled to so walk in the Spirit that we will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, by His grace.

The task unto which the Lord Jesus here calls us is that of *mortification*, the putting to *death* of our evil lusts. That this is a most unwelcome and painful work, He warns us by the figures He employed. Unto those who object that the keeping of their hearts free from unlawful desires and lustful imaginations is a task utterly beyond their powers, Christ replies, If, as you say, it is impossible, if there be no other way for governing your appetites (which, blessed be God, through His grace, there is), then pluck out and cut off your offending members, rather than use them to the eternal undoing of your souls. Who is there among us who would not consent to the amputation of a gangrened limb, no matter how painful the operation and heavy the loss, if persuaded that this was imperative in order for life itself to be preserved? Then why refuse painful mortification which is essential to the

saving of the *soul*? When tempted to shrink therefrom, seriously consider the only other alternative—in Hell both body and soul will be tormented forever and ever.

Not only must there be the uncompromising avoidance and refusal of all that is evil, but we must abridge ourselves in or totally abstain from things lawful in themselves, if we find they are occasions of temptation to us. “Take a familiar illustration. A person is fond of wine: it is agreeable to his taste; it is useful in refreshing him after severe exertion. But he finds that this taste has seduced him into intemperance; he finds that there is constant danger of its doing so. He has fallen before the temptation again and again. What is such a person’s duty? According to our Lord, it is obviously to abstain from it entirely—on this plain principle, that the evil he incurs by abstaining, however keenly felt, is as nothing to the evil to which the intemperate use of wine subjects him—even everlasting punishment in Hell. And to make this abstinence his duty, it is not necessary that he should know that he will fall before his temptation: it is enough that he knows that, as he has repeatedly fallen before it, he may fall before it again” (John Brown).—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID.

92. *His Prevailing Intercession.*

It is both interesting and instructive to note in how many different characters David is brought before us in 2 Samuel 24. First, as the proud and haughty one: which may be inferred from the opening, "And," of the chapter (following upon his remarkable victories, and the extension of his kingdom), and confirmed in Psalm 30:6, which refers to this very time, and will (D.V.) be considered by us in a later article. Second, the tempted one, as 1 Chronicles 21:1 more definitely shows. Third, as the foolish one, deciding upon a military census when there was no need or Divine commission for it. Fourth, the intractable one, when he stubbornly refused to yield unto the counsel of his officers or listen to their remonstrance (2 Sam. 24:3, 4), determining to have his own way. The logical order in these downward steps is apparent on the surface.

Now on the other side, we behold him, fifth, as the penitent one, mourning over his sins and confessing the same to God (v. 10). Sixth, as the submissive one; not murmuring against the severity of God as he heard the terrible pronouncement of the Prophet, but meekly bowing to the Divine verdict. Seventh, the prudent one: preferring to fall into the hand of the Lord rather than into the hand of man. Eighth, as the believing and confident one: recognizing and owning the greatness of the Divine mercies (v. 14). Ninth, as the chastened one: the judgment of God falling upon his beloved subjects (v. 15), which he felt more keenly than had the rod descended upon himself and his own house. Tenth, as the intercessor before God; stepping into the breach and making supplication for his afflicted kingdom. Here, too, we may perceive clearly the logical sequence of these things.

It is, however, in this last character, as *the intercessor* before God, that we are now to specially consider David. But we shall miss one of the most striking points in connection therewith, and one of the most instructive and valuable lessons for our own hearts therein, if we fail to observe very particularly the *order* before us. It is not every believer who has power with God in prayer. Far from it; rather are there, alas, very few who can prevail with the Lord in their supplications on the behalf of others. Nor is the reason for this far to seek: they possess not the requisite qualifications. They do not have those marks which fitted David on this occasion. If we are walking contrary to the Divine commandments (1 John 3:22), or there be unmentioned and unconfessed sin in our lives, then the Lord will not hear us (Psa. 66:18).

We sincerely trust the reader does not weary of our so often calling attention to the order of events in a narrative, for very often lessons of fundamental importance are thereby inculcated. It is so in the case before us. It is by duly noting *what preceded* David's prevailing intercession, that we learn how we may become successful supplicants on behalf of others. First, there must be a putting right of what in our own lives is displeasing to a holy God: by a genuine contrition for and humble acknowledgement to Him of our offenses. Second, there must be entire submission beneath His chastening hand, meekly bowing to His righteous rod. Third, an implicit confidence in His wisdom, faithfulness, and goodness, so that we freely yield ourselves into His hands. Fourth, a real persuasion of the greatness of His mercies, laying hold thereof by faith and pleading the same before Him.

"So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men" (2 Sam. 24:15). First of all, let us note how exactly the punishment answered to the

crime! Penitent though he was, yet David must be corrected; and as his offense had been a public one, so is the retribution. But it is indeed striking to see that the rod of God fell in the very place of His servant's transgression. David had doted upon his thousands, and his thousands must be drastically reduced! God now numbered to the sword, those whom David had numbered to his self-complacency—one twentieth (cf. v. 9) being slain. Clearly, then, it was *the pride* of David against which this Divine judgment was directed. "Whatever we idolize or grow proud of, God will generally take from us, or else convert it into a cross" (Thomas Scott).

Yet it is also to be noted that God's scourge fell immediately upon the people themselves, for it was against *them* Jehovah had a controversy (v. 1). "A solemn time it must have been. Pestilence was walking in darkness, and destruction was wasting at noonday. The destroying angel was actively at work, and no man was able to withstand him. Throughout the length and breadth of the land death was claiming its victims. Who would next be struck no one could tell. No remedy availed to cure the sick. No intercession, however urgent, succeeded in preserving the life of a beloved one. All joy must have fled: all energy for ordinary pursuits must have been paralyzed. God was working, and in power. Of old He had laid bare His arm, and worked in power on behalf of Israel; now His hand was outstretched, but in this deadly way *against* them. Could any charge Him with injustice? No. They deserved the chastisement, though David's act in numbering them was the proximate cause for this visitation. Helpless, how helpless were they all. Their only hope was in the mercy of God" (C. E. Stuart).

Let us see in this solemn incident a demonstration of how easily God can reduce the haughtiest of sinners: the "day of the Lord" (His acting in judgment) is ever upon those who are proud and lifted up (Isa. 2:12). Then how greatly are we indebted daily to His longsufferance! Stout-hearted rebels, who carry themselves with such effrontery against the Most High, little realize how much they owe to His wondrous patience; but they shall yet discover there are limits even to that. Someone has pertinently pointed out that, "If the power of angels be so terrible—a single one smiting with death 70,000 Israelites in a single day—what is that of the all-mighty Creator!?" Rightly then does He ask "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee?" (Ezek. 22:14).

"So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed." This expression "the time appointed" can mean either the close of the third day or, as many think, the season of the evening sacrifice of the first day. The Hebrew may be literally rendered, "till the time of appointed assembly," that is, the hour set apart for the meeting together of Israel for the evening worship. The renowned scholar Hengstenberg remarks as follows: "The calamity according to 2 Samuel 24:16 lasted from morning till the time of meeting, by which we are to understand 'the evening religious assembly'—compare 1 Kings 18:29, 36; 2 Kings 16:15." But altogether apart from the meaning of the Hebrew, there are two considerations which seem to require this rendering. First, because the phrase, "till the time appointed," stands in opposition to, "from the *morning*." Second, from the statement in the next verse, "The Lord repented Him of the evil."

The last-quoted clause appears to us to plainly denote that He did not go to the full length of the judgment announced. Yet even in that brief period there fell of Israel 70,000, in as many hours as Joab had taken months in numbering the people. But by the mercy of God the duration of the awful pestilence was shortened. Judgment is God's

“strange work,” for He delights in mercy, yet His mercy never ignores the requirements of His holiness nor sets aside the demands of His justice. And most blessedly may we perceive here the meeting-place of these two grand sides of the Divine character. It was the sweet savour of the evening sacrifice which stayed the desolating plague! What a wondrous foreshadowing was this—brought out still more plainly in what follows—of that which is set forth without veil or symbol in the New Testament. The Cross of Christ is where the varied attributes of God all shine forth in blended harmony.

“And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented Him of the evil” (v. 16). Let us first remove a misapprehension at this point. Enemies of the Truth have not been slow to seize upon this reference to the Lord’s repenting (and similar passages, such as Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:11, etc.), and have drawn the wicked inference that God is fickle, subject to changes of mind like the creature is. Arminians misuse such verses in their vain efforts to overthrow the doctrine of foreordination. But nothing is more clearly revealed in Holy Writ than the *immutability* of God. “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?” (Num. 23:19). “But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth” (Job 23:13). “For I am the Lord: I change not” (Mal. 3:6). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). It is impossible for language to be more explicit, emphatic, and unequivocal. If such definite declarations do not mean what they say and are not to be understood at their face value, then it is a waste of time to read the Bible.

Now it is quite obvious to any spiritual mind that the Scriptures cannot contradict themselves, and that there is perfect harmony (whether we can perceive it or not) between those verses which appear to conflict with each other. When we are unable to discern their complete accord, then it is the part of wisdom to acknowledge our ignorance and wait upon God for fuller light. And while so doing, those passages which perplex us must be subordinated to others which are plain to us. Thus we may rest assured that those declarations which so positively affirm God’s immutability or unchangeableness are to be regarded absolutely without any qualification, whereas those which seem to speak of His changing His mind are to be taken relatively and figuratively. If Arminians deem this a begging of the question, then we ask them, Does not the express declaration of 1 Samuel 15:29 *oblige us* to interpret 1 Sam. 15:11 in a non-natural sense? Certainly the Holy Spirit would not contradict Himself within the scope of two verses in the same chapter!

The fact of the matter is that God often condescends to employ anthropomorphisms in His Word, that is, He graciously accommodates Himself to *our* limited capacities and *speaks after the manner of men*. Thus we read of Him being “wearied” (Isa. 43:24; Mal. 2:17), yet in another place we are told, “the Creator fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isa. 40:28). In Deuteronomy 32:27 Jehovah speaks as “fearing the wrath of the enemy,” which is manifestly a figure of speech. Again, in Psalm 78:65 we read, “The Lord awaked as one out of sleep,” yet we know full well that He never slumbers. In Isaiah 59:16 it is said that He “wondered,” yet nothing can take Him by surprise. Jeremiah 7:13 pictures Him as “rising early,” to denote His earnestness. And so we might go on. The “repenting” of the Lord in 2 Samuel 24:16 signifies no change of mind, but intimates an alteration in His *outward* course—the cessation of His judgment.

“And when the angel stretched out His hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented Him of the evil.” Scripture is many-sided and it is only by carefully comparing one passage with another that we are enabled to obtain the full light upon any given incident. Such is the case before us here. Above, we have called attention to the significant and blessed fact that the destructive plague upon Israel was stayed at the hour of the evening sacrifice. Now we would point out another and supplementary angle. Of old the Lord had declared concerning Israel, “If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then *accept of the punishment* of their iniquity: Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land” (Lev. 26:40-42). This was exactly what David had, in principle, done. He not only confessed his iniquity and humbled his heart (2 Sam. 24:10), but also bowed to God’s rod “accepting the punishment” (v. 14). So that it was now in *covenant faithfulness* Jehovah acted in causing the plague to cease!

“And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented Him of the evil.” In the supplementary account supplied us in 1 Chronicles 21 we are told, “And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the Heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem” (v. 16). That “drawn sword” was the emblem of Divine justice. How it reminds us of those solemn words of Jehovah, “Awake O Sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the Shepherd” (Zech. 13:7). And how striking the contrast between the two passages. There in Zechariah the sword was, as it were, slumbering, and was called to “Awake.” Why? because it was against the Holy One: there was nothing in Him personally the “sword” could find fault with! But different far was it here with guilty Israel: the sword needed no awaking, but was drawn in the angel’s hand.

“And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand” (2 Sam. 24:16). How blessedly this presents to us once more the precious truth, which is the sure ground of all our hopes, that with our God “mercy rejoiceth against judgment” (James, 2:13). The whole system of Israel had exposed itself to the wrath of the Lord. He might have broken it at once as a vessel wherein was no pleasure. He might have taken away His vineyard from His unthankful and wicked husbandmen: but “mercy rejoiceth against judgment” in the heart of their God, and therefore He commanded the destroying angel to stay his hand. And why? God’s holiness had been satisfied, His justice had been appeased. “It is enough”: “stay now thine hand”: how these words remind us of that blessed utterance of our Saviour, “It is finished”—proclaiming the glorious truth that all the claims of God are now fully met.

“And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father’s house” (2 Sam. 24:17). The exact point at which this intercession occurred is made much plainer in 1 Chronicles 21. There we learn there were two distinct parts or stages to the Divine judgment. First, we are told, “So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel

seventy thousand men” (v. 14): this was accomplished by angelic agency as is clear from 2 Samuel 24, and it was terminated at the time of the evening sacrifice, and that, by the Covenant faithfulness of Jehovah. Second, “And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it” (v. 15)—a separate thing from the preceding. “And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD. . . then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto the LORD, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed” (v. 16, 17). It was at that critical moment he stepped into the breach and made successful intercession.

First, let us notice that David did not here make the fatal mistake of supplicating the angel: no, he was better instructed than are the poor deluded Papists of our day. Second, observe that David did not throw the blame upon the Nation, but incriminated himself. “Most people, when God’s judgements are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, and care not who falls by them, so *they* can escape; but David’s penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected” (Matthew Henry). This is most beautiful and striking. David took the blame entirely upon himself: “Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed”—it was as though he could not paint his own faults in sufficiently dark colours. “As for these sheep, what have they done?” How dear were they to his heart! No charge would he prefer against them. “Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O LORD, be on me and on my father’s house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued” (v. 17): smite their shepherd, but spare the flock, O Lord.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

9. *Its Perception.*

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1 Thess. 1:4). How did the Apostle know that those Thessalonians were among God’s elect? The next verses tell us: by *the visible fruits* thereof which he perceived in them. Discerning in their lives those effects of grace which had been wrought in them at their conversion, he traced back the same unto God’s eternal purpose of mercy concerning them. And, my reader, the way in which Paul knew the Thessalonian believers were “from the beginning chosen to salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13) must be the method by which every Christian today is to ascertain his or her election of God.

“For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5). Everything turns upon *how* the (true) Gospel is received by us: whether it is merely apprehended by the intellect, or whether it really reaches the conscience and heart, for only then is it received with a saving faith. When God’s Word comes to us “in power,” it comes as “a two-edged sword”—cutting, wounding, causing pain and deep distress. When the Word comes to us in power it is not due to any learning or eloquence of the preacher, nor to any pathos which he may employ. The fact that his hearers’ emotions are deeply stirred so that they are moved to tears is no proof whatever that the Gospel is come to them in Divine efficacy: creature passions are often stirred by the actings of the stage and thousands are moved to weep in the theater. Such superficial emotionalism is but evanescent, having no lasting and spiritual effects. The test is whether we are broken and bowed before God.

The same thought is expressed again in the next verse, as though this is the particular detail by which we most need to test ourselves: “having received the Word in *much affliction*, with joy of the Holy Spirit” (v. 6). How that exposes the worthlessness of the light and frothy “evangelism” (?) of the day! How solemn it is to remember that Christ described the stony-ground hearer as, “he that heareth the Word and anon with *joy* receiveth it: yet he hath not root in himself” (Matt. 13:20, 21). Very different was it with those who were converted on the day of Pentecost, for the first thing recorded of them is, that they were “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). Travail precedes birth, and then comes the rejoicing (see John 16:21). These are the questions to be considered—and answered before God: has the Word rebuked and condemned me? has it stripped me of my self-complacency and self-righteousness? has it cut down my hopes, and brought me to lie as self-condemned felon before the Mercy Seat?

“People come and hear sermons in this place, and then they go out and say, ‘How did you like it?’—as if *that* signified anything. ‘How did you like it?’ and one says, ‘Oh, very well,’ and another says, ‘Oh, not at all.’ Do you think we live on the breath of your nostrils? Do you believe that God’s servants, if they are really His, care for what you think of them? Nay, verily; but if you should reply, ‘I enjoyed the sermon,’ they are inclined to say, ‘Then we must have been unfaithful, or else you would have been angry; we must surely have slurred over something, or else the Word would have cut your conscience as with the jagged edges of a knife. You would have said, ‘I did not think how I liked it; I was thinking how I liked myself, and about my own state before God; *that* was the matter that exercised me, not whether he preached well, but whether I stood accepted in Christ, or whether I was a castaway.’ My dear hearers, are you learning to hear like that? If you are not—if going to church and to chapel be to you like going to an oratorio, or like lis-

tening to some orator who speaks upon temporal matters, then you lack the evidence of election; the Word has not come to your souls with power" (C. H. Spurgeon).

In between the portions quoted above from 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6 are two other details: first, "and in much assurance." When the Word comes home in converting power to a man's soul, all his doubts concerning its authenticity and authority are removed, and he needs no human arguments to convince him that its Author is *God*. All the skepticism of the rationalists and higher critics would be dispelled like mist before the rising sun, if the Spirit were pleased to effectually apply the Word to their hearts. Those who have been made to feel their dire need of Christ and have perceived His perfect suitability to their desperate condition, have "much assurance" of what the Gospel affirms of His Person and work. Whatever may have been the case with them formerly, they have no doubt now about His absolute Deity, His virgin birth, His vicarious death, His pre-eminent dignity, as Prophet, Priest, and King. These all-important things are settled for him, settled forever, and he will declare himself positively and with a dogmatism which will shock the sensibilities of the supercilious.

Again it is said, "ye became followers of us and of the Lord." Here is another mark of election: those who are chosen by the Lord *desire to be like Him*. "Ye became followers of us" does not mean that they said, "I am of Paul, I am of Silas, I am of Timothy," but that they imitated those eminent evangelists so far as they followed the example which Christ has left us. Ah, *that* is the test, my readers. Are we Christlike? or do we honestly wish to be so? Then that is a sure evidence of our election. Do we live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4)?—Christ did. Do we take everything to God in prayer?—Christ did. Do we pray God to bless those who curse us? It is not are we sinless, perfect. But are we, though often "afar off," really following Christ? If we are, it is not proud boastfulness to acknowledge it, nor is it self-righteousness to derive comfort therefrom, providing we also grieve over our many shortcomings and mourn over our sins.

"With joy of the Holy Spirit." Mark the qualifying language: it is not carnal mirth, but spiritual gladness. And observe too, that this concludes the list, for it is ever the Lord's way to reserve the best wine for the last. Alas, how few professors know anything, experimentally, about this deep spiritual joy. The religion of the vast majority consists of a slavish attendance upon forms that they delight not in. How many go to some place of worship simply because it is not respectable to stay away, though they often wish it were? Not so with the Christian—when he is in his right mind: he goes to worship the Lord, to hear the voice of his Beloved, seeking a fresh love-token from Him, desiring to bask in the sunshine of His presence. And when he is favoured with a visit from Christ, he exclaims with Jacob, "This is the house of God," a foretaste of Heaven.

And now in drawing to a conclusion our remarks upon this fascinating aspect of the subject, there remains one other verse we must ponder: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). Those words have been fearfully wrested by errorists. Enemies of the Truth have perverted them to signify that the Divine decree concerning salvation is but provisional, conditional on the sinner's own efforts. They deny that any man's predestination to eternal life is absolute and irrevocable, insisting that it is contingent upon our own personal diligence. In other words, man himself must decide and determine whether God's desire for him is to be realized. Not only is such a concept entirely foreign to the teaching of Holy Writ, but to say that the ratification and realization of God's eternal purpose is left dependent on something

from the creature, is sheer blasphemy—and were it true, would not only render our election uncertain, but utterly hopeless.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” These words have also presented a real problem to not a few of God’s people. They have been sorely perplexed to understand how any diligence on their part could possibly make God’s calling and election sure; and even when that difficulty is cleared up, they are quite at a loss to know what form their diligence is to take. Ah, my friends, God has often expressed Himself in the Scriptures in such a way as to test our faith, humble our hearts, and drive us to our knees. Perhaps it may afford most help if we concentrate on the following points. First, the particular people here addressed. Second, the unusual order of “calling and election.” Third, what is the “diligence” here required? Fourth, in what sense can we make our calling and election “sure”?

First, the people addressed. If this simple but essential principle were duly heeded, what a mass of erroneous expositions would be avoided! It is the mis-application of Scripture which is responsible for so much faulty interpretation. When the children’s bread be cast unto the dogs, the former are robbed and the latter given that which they cannot digest. To take all exhortation which is addressed to believers and appropriate it, or rather misappropriate it, to unbelievers, is an excuseless offense: yet such has often been done with the verse before us. There is no difficulty whatever in ascertaining the addressees of this Divine injunction. The opening verse of the Epistle tells us that the Apostle is here writing to those who had “obtained like precious faith,” so that they were *believers*; while in the verse itself they are styled “brethren” and exhorted as such.

This exhortation, then, is addressed to living saints and not to dead sinners. To teach that the unregenerate can do anything at all toward securing their calling and election, is not only colossal ignorance, but it gives the lie to God’s Word. When they are delivering a Divine message, the first duty of God’s ministers is to draw very definitely the line of demarcation between the Church and the world: it is failure at this point which causes so many children of the Devil to claim relationship with the people of God. Attention to the *context* will almost always make it clear *to whom* a passage pertains: whether to the children of men in general or to the children of God in particular. The simplest and most effective way of making this plain to their hearers is for them to carefully delineate the *characters* (the identifying marks) of the one and of the other—note how the Apostle followed this very course in the first four verses of the Epistle.

Second, the unusual order that is found here: “your calling and election.” Though at first sight this presents a difficulty, yet further study will show it really supplies an important key to the opening of this exhortation. That which puzzles the thoughtful reader is, why “calling” comes *before* “election,” for as we have sought so show at length in previous articles, effectual calling is the *consequence* of election, as it is also the manifestation thereof. As Romans 8:28 declares, believers are, “the called according to His purpose”: that is, the calling is in pursuance of God’s purpose. So, too, in Romans 8:30 it is said, “Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” Likewise, “Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose” (2 Tim. 1:9). Why, then, are these two things inverted in the passage we are now considering?

It is to be carefully noted that Romans 8:28, 30; and 2 Timothy 1:9 are treating of *God’s* acts, whereas 2 Peter 1:10 mentions calling and election in connection with *our*

diligence. It is only by duly noting such distinctions that we can hope to arrive at a right understanding of many of the details of Holy Writ. In Romans 8 the Apostle is propounding doctrine, whereas in 2 Peter 1:10 he is pressing an exhortation, and there is a marked difference between those things. When the ways of God are being expounded, they are presented in their natural or logical order (as in Rom. 8:30), but when Christian *experience* is being dealt with, the order in which we apprehend the Truth is the one followed. Thus it is here: we are first to make sure that we have been the recipients of an effectual call, for that in turn will furnish proof of our election. The order of God's thoughts toward us was, election and then calling; but in our experience we apprehend calling before election.

Third, what is the "diligence" here required? There are multitudes who fancy they have received an effectual call from God, but it is merely fancy: instead of prayerfully and diligently devoting themselves to the duty here enjoined, they give themselves the benefit of the doubt. Probably many are quite sincere in their supposition, but they are sincerely mistaken, being led astray by their deceitful hearts. It is far from being sufficient to adopt the doctrine of election as an article of our creed. As one tersely put it:

"Though God's election is a truth,
Small comfort there I see,
Till I am told by God's own mouth,
That He hath chosen me."

And I have no right or warrant to expect that He will ever do any such thing, till I have complied with His requirements in the verse now before us.

That to which I am here exhorted is to first make sure my "calling" of God. This is to be done by accumulating and strengthening my evidence that I am His born-again child; and that, in turn, is accomplished by cultivating the character and conduct of a saint. And how is that to be achieved? By using the means of grace which God has provided: such as the daily reading of the Scriptures with spiritual meditation thereon; by secret and fervent prayer for Divine succour and grace; by cultivating fellowship with God's people, so far as His providence permits this; by keeping faithful watch over our hearts, disallowing all that is unholy; by the strict denial of self and mortification of our members. But we shall receive most help at this point if we attend unto something yet more specific in the context.

In 2 Peter 1:5-7 we are exhorted, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love." Now verse 10 expresses the same duty, but in different words. There is a striking parallelism in this chapter, and it is by noting the repetition (in variation of thought) that we find the chief key to our verse. In verses 5-7 we have an exhortation, and in verse 8 we are shown the result of heeding it. In verse 10 we also have a similar exhortation, and then in verse 11 the result of compliance therewith is shown. Thus our text is to be interpreted in the light of its context. What is the "diligence" here required? of what does it consist? Verses 5 to 7 tell us. It is by carefully cultivating the spiritual graces therein mentioned that I may ascertain my calling and election.

Fourth, in what sense do we make our calling and election "sure"? First, observe it is *not* "make secure": they are already secured to every saint by the immutability of the Divine purpose, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). It is

not the making of our calling and election sure Godwards, but *manwards*. Nor is it something future which is here in view: it is the present *enjoyment* to ourselves of our calling and election, and of *evidencing* the same to our brethren. By heeding the exhortation of 2 Peter 1:5-7, I am to prove my calling and election, and demonstrate the same to the Church. A man may tell me he believes in election and is sure that he has been called of God, but unless I can see in his character and conduct the spiritual graces of verses 5-7, then I have to say of him (as Paul did of the Galatians), "I stand in doubt of you." Here, then, is the meaning: make steadfast in your own conscience your calling and election, and make good to others your profession, by walking as a child of God.

Finally, two *consequences* of complying with those exhortations are pointed out. First, "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (v. 10.) Those who give all diligence to cultivate the spiritual graces mentioned in verses 5-7, (thereby making their calling and election sure, both to themselves and to their brethren), shall never fall from the place of communion with God; shall never fall from the Truth into false doctrine and error; shall never fall into grievous sins, and so disgrace their Christian profession; shall never fall into a state of backsliding, so that they lose their relish for spiritual things; shall never fall under sore discipline from God; shall never fall into despondency so as to lose all assurance; shall never fall into a condition of spiritual uselessness. But, second, "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly*, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 11): experimentally so here; fully and honourably so in the future. This is the result and reward of "diligence": the Greek word for "ministered" in verse 11 is the same as "added" in verse 5!

And now to summarize. How may a real believer ascertain that he is one of God's elect? Why, the very fact he *is* a genuine Christian evidences it, for a believing unto Christ is the sure consequence of God's having ordained him to eternal life (Acts 13:48). But to be more specific. *How* may I know my election? First, by the Word of God, having come in Divine power to the soul, so that my self-complacency is shattered and my self-righteousness renounced. Second, by the Spirit's having convicted me of my woeful, guilty, and lost condition. Third, by having had revealed to me the suitability and sufficiency of Christ to meet my desperate case, and by a Divinely-given faith causing me to lay hold of and rest upon Him as my only hope.

Fourth, by the marks of the new nature within me: a love for God, an appetite for spiritual things, a longing for holiness, a seeking after conformity to Christ. Fifth, by the resistance which the new nature makes to the old, causing me to hate sin and loath myself for it. Sixth, by sedulously avoiding everything which is condemned by God's Word, and by sincerely repenting of and humbly confessing every transgression thereof. Failure at this point will most surely and quickly bring a dark cloud over our assurance, causing the Spirit to withhold His witness. Seventh, by giving all diligence to cultivate the Christian graces, and using all legitimate means to this end. Thus, knowledge of election is cumulative.—A.W.P.

ENJOYING CREATION.

Psalm 104 is all through a song of nature, the adoration of God in the great outward temple of the universe. Some in these modern times have thought it to be a mark of high spirituality never to observe nature; and I remember sorrowfully reading the expressions of a godly person, who, in sailing down one of the most famous rivers in the world closed his eyes, lest the picturesque beauties of the scene should divert his mind from scriptural topics. This may be regarded by some as profound spirituality; to me it seems to savor of absurdity. There may be persons who think they have grown in grace when they have attained to this; it seems to me that they are growing out of their senses. To despise the creating work of God—what is it but, in a measure, to despise God Himself? “Whoso mocketh the poor despiseth his Maker.”

To despise the Maker, then, is evidently a sin; to think little of God under the aspect of the Creator is a crime. We should none of us think it a great honour if our friends considered our productions to be unworthy of admiration, and more injurious to their minds than improving. If when they passed our workmanship they turned their eyes away, lest they should suffer injury by looking at it, we should not regard them as very respectful to ourselves: surely the despising of that which is made is akin to the despising of the Maker Himself. David tells us that, “the Lord shall rejoice in His works.” If He rejoices in what He has made, shall not those who have communion with Him rejoice in His works also? “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of them that have pleasure therein.” Despise not the work, lest thou despise the Worker.

The prejudice against the beauties of the universe reminds me of the lingering love to Judaism, which acted like a spell upon Peter of old. When the sheet knit at the four corners descended before him, and the voice said, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat,” he replied that he had not eaten anything that was common or unclean. He needed that the voice should speak to him from Heaven again and again before he would fully learn the lesson, “What God hath cleansed that call not thou unclean.” The Jew thinks this and that unclean, though Christ has cleansed it; and certain Christians appear to regard nature as unclean. The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the glorious sunrise and sunset, the snow-clad Alps, the ancient forests, the boundless ocean, God hath cleansed them: call them not common. Here on this earth at Calvary where the Saviour died, and by His sacrifice offered not within walls and roofs, He made this outer world a temple wherein everything doth speak of God’s glory. If thou be unclean, all things will be unclean to thee; but if thou hast washed thy robe and made it white in the blood of the Lamb, and if the Holy Spirit hath overshadowed thee, then this world is but a nether Heaven; it is but the lower chamber of which the upper story glows with the full splendour of God, where angels see Him face to face, and this lower story is not without glory, for in the Person of Christ Jesus we have seen God, and have fellowship with Him even now.

It appears to me that those who would forbear the study of nature, or shun the observation of its beauties, are conscious of the weakness of their own spirituality. When the hermits and monks shut themselves out from the temptations of life, foolish persons said, “These are strong in grace.” Not so, they were so weak in grace that they were afraid to have their graces tried. They ran away from the battle like the cowards they were, and shut themselves up because they knew their swords were not of the true Jerusalem metal, and they were not men who could resist valiantly. Monasticism was the confession of a weakness, which they endeavoured to cover with the vain show of humility, and the pre-

tence of superior sanctity. If my graces are strong, I can look upon the outward world, and draw forth its good without feeling its evil, if evil there be; but if my religion is mainly fictitious, then hypocrisy dictates to me the affectation of unusual spirituality, or at any rate I have not grace enough to rise from a contemplation of the works of God to a nearer communion with God Himself. It cannot be that nature of itself debases me, or diverts me from God, I ought to suspect a deficiency in myself when I find that the Creator's handiwork has not a good effect upon my soul.

Moreover, rest assured, brethren, that He who wrote the Bible, the second and clearest revelation of His Divine mind, wrote also the first Book, the book of nature; and who are we that we should derogate from the worth of the first because we esteem the second? Milton's "Paradise Regained" is certainly inferior to his "Paradise Lost," but the eternal God has no inferior productions, all His works are masterpieces. There is no quarrel between nature and revelation, fools only think so; to wise men the one illustrates and establishes the other. Walking in the fields at eventide, as Isaac did, I see in the ripening harvest the same God of whom I read in the Word that He covenanted that seed-time and harvest should not cease. Surveying the midnight skies, I remember Him who, while He calls the stars by their names, also bindeth up the broken in heart. Who will may neglect the volume of creation, or the volume of revelation: I shall delight in them both as long as I live.—C. H. Spurgeon.

THE HOLY SABBATH.

7. *Its Christianization.*

That the Judaical Sabbath, as such, has been abolished, we unhesitatingly affirm; but to conclude from this that there is now no "Sabbath" in the strict and proper sense of that term, we emphatically deny. Serious errors have been committed at either extreme. On the one hand there has been an insignificant company who have vigorously contended that God has given no command for any change to be made in the weekly Day of Rest, and therefore that we, in this dispensation, are required to observe the *seventh* day. On the other hand, another class has insisted that the "Sabbath" has been completely abolished, though they allow that it is the privilege of Christians (any *law* requiring the same, they deny) to honour Christ in a special manner on the *first* day of the week. The Truth lies between these two extremes: the Sabbath remains, though it has undergone some noticeable changes in its Christianization.

A thorough inquiry into the precise differences between the Judaical Sabbath and the Christian Sabbath (deeply important as such an inquiry is)—differences as to its significance, its penal sanction, its day of observance, etc.—would require a full exposition of the Siniatic covenant; but as we recently went into that subject at length, it is not necessary for us to traverse the same ground again. But a brief summary of its salient and distinctive features seems unavoidable. Originally, the Sabbath was "made for man" (Mark 2:27); it being required of him naturally, the light and law of nature suggesting that some time be set apart and dedicated to God for the observance of his solemn worship in the world. Man in his creation, with respect to the ends of God therein, was constituted under a covenant: the law of his obedience being attended by promise and threatening, reward and punishment.

During the interval which elapsed between the fall of Adam and the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the nations had completely apostatised from God, and had been given up by Him to a spirit of blindness (Rom. 1:21-28). The dealings of God with the Hebrews marked a fresh and distinctive departure in the Divine ways with mankind. At Sinai the descendants of Jacob were taken into special covenant relationship with Jehovah. As the Sabbath had been originally annexed to the covenant between God and man (Adam, and the race in him), the renovation of the covenant (at Sinai) necessarily required an especial renewal of the Sabbath, and the change of the covenant as to the nature of it, necessarily introduced a change of the Sabbath. In what respects, we shall endeavour to point out.

When God erected His Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), renewing the knowledge of Himself and of man's duty toward Him, in the posterity of Abraham, He gave unto them afresh the precepts of the Law and the Covenant of Works, for the rule of their obedience, reducing the same to Ten Commandments written on tables of stone. As thus delivered by Him, it was the same for the substance of it with the law of our creation or the original rule of our covenant obedience unto God. Yet as thus inscribed, there was an innovation in it, both as to its form and the principle of obligation. In form it was now made objective and external; and the immediate obligation unto its observance was prefaced by motives peculiar to their state and condition (Exo. 20:2). Later, its observance was continually pressed upon them by reasons taken from their peculiar relation to God, with His love and benefits unto them. It was now no more a moral command only,

equally regarding all mankind, but had a *temporary* regard given to it, which was afterwards to be abolished.

The law was renewed as an ingredient in that economy under which God placed His Church at Sinai, though He did not bring His people under the Covenant of Works, in all the rigour of it—relief being found, for those betaking themselves to it, in the promise of grace in Christ. Nevertheless, there was begotten in the minds of the people such a sense of the demands of the Law and their obedience thereto, that it “gendereth to bondage” (Gal. 4:24). Annexed to the Law was the promise of, “Do this, and live”; and the threat, “cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Law to do them.” Consequently, the Covenant form given to the Law at Sinai rendered the obedience of the people to it in a great measure servile. The death sentence was pronounced upon those who desecrated the Sabbath (Exo. 35:2, 3).

The moral Law, to which was attached many statutes of both a civic and ceremonial nature, was made the rule of the government of Israel, as a holy nation under the dominion of God Himself as their King. Thus the whole Decalogue as given at Sinai had a *political* use, that is, it was made the principal instrument of the polity or government of the Nation as peculiarly under the rule of God. Their polity, as to the kind of it, was a theocracy, over which God in a special manner presided as their Governor, and this was peculiar to that people. Hence the Sabbath amongst them came to have an absolute necessity accompanying it, of an outward carnal ordinance, under pain of death if they neglected the same.

Again—the Sabbath was made a part of their law for religious worship in their temporal Church state, in which and whereby the whole dispensation of the covenant which Israel was under, was directed to other ends. Thus it had the nature of a shadow, representing good things to come, whereby the people were to be relieved from the rigour and curse of the whole law as a Covenant. Hence, new commands were given for the observance of the Sabbath, new motives advanced, new ends and uses formulated, so as to accommodate it to the dispensation of the Covenant then in force, but which was afterwards to be removed and taken away, and with it the Sabbath itself so far as it had relation thereto. Therefore we have no hesitation in subscribing to the following words of Owen:

“All these things in the law of the Sabbath are Mosaic: namely, the obligation that arose to its observance, from the promulgation of the Law unto that people at Sinai; the limitation of the day to the seventh or last of the week, which was necessary to that administration of the Covenant which God then made use of, and had a respect to a previous institution; the manner of its observance, suited to that servile and bondage frame of mind, which the giving of the law on Mount Sinai did generate in them, as being designed of God so to do; the engrafting of it into the system and series of religious worship then in force, by the double sacrifice annexed to it; with the various uses in, and accommodation it had to the rule of government in the commonwealth of Israel; in all which respects it is abolished, taken away.”

If, then, noticeable changes were made in connection with the Sabbath when God took the people of Israel into covenant relationship with Himself, need we wonder that other changes were made when the Siniatic covenant and constitution were abolished? In order to distinguish the Christian Sabbath from what had obtained for 15 centuries, was it not expedient, might we say, *essential*, that under the era of the new Covenant, it should be observed on a new and different day? But alas, the perversity of men has led not a few of

them to argue from that very change of the day from the last to the first of the week, that the Sabbath itself is completely done away with under the Christian dispensation. They insist that an entirely new institution has displaced it, an institution which consists in a certain pre-eminence of the first day

Once again we avail ourselves freely of the writings of P. Fairbairn, and point out, first, even if we could assign no adequate reason for the seventh day being dropped and the first substituted in its place, a mere change of that kind would certainly not outweigh, with any serious-minded believer, the arguments we have produced in support of a Sabbath reaching from the creation of the world to the destruction of Jerusalem. This is a chain which links together Moses and Christ, the patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian times. We should certainly be the less disposed to set aside the large amount of evidence, and to view the change in question as in itself conclusive against the existence of a proper Sabbath, when we know that the *first* day, on being appropriated to acts of worship, received the name of “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). Why called emphatically *His*, but to intimate that He now claimed the same propriety in it that he had hitherto done in the seventh?

If the first day, as a day—that is, as a whole, and not some particular portion of it—is *the Lord’s*, in a sense in which other days of the week are not, how can it possibly be so, except in being set apart for employments and services peculiar to itself, and more immediately connected with His own glory? Was not this very feature the distinctive characteristic of the seventh day: that it was *God’s* day, because specially separated by Him for sacred purposes? And does not this very character appear plainly in the appellation, “the Lord’s Day,” as transferring to the first day of the week that which had, essentially, marked the seventh day from Adam until Christ?

The principal feature which had distinguished the Sabbath from the very first, as designed for all classes and generations of men, is that a *seventh portion* of our time should be specially devoted to the worship of God, rather than the precise day of the week being the thing on which attention was to be fixed. It is the remembrance of a seventh day, as distinguished from the other six constantly going before and coming after it, which formed the substance of the Fourth Commandment, and that the seventh day was to be regarded as the last, rather than the first day of the week, appears only in what is assigned to the original ground of the appointment. We have no reason, but rather the contrary, to think that the Lord intended it to be always and solely connected with His own procedure in the work of creation.

At the giving of manna in the wilderness, when the Sabbath was restored after a period of oblivion, caused by the hard bondage of Egypt, the seventh day was counted from the time of God’s beginning to bestow the manna. And instead of bidding them to keep it as a mere memorial of creation, He more frequently enforced it on their regard as a sign of the Covenant which He had with them, and a memorial of His goodness in delivering them from the land of bondage. After all this, is it not preposterous to suppose that the mere change of the day from the last to the first of the week, so as more distinctly to connect it with another and better Covenant and render it the fitting memorial of a higher and more glorious work, should utterly destroy its obligation or alter its character?

Again—let it be duly considered that the change was not made capriciously but for weighty and important reasons connected with the new work and covenant of God as distinguished both from that to which it stood immediately opposed in Judaism, and from

that to which more remotely, but still more essentially, it stood opposed in creation. The observance of the last day of the week, as peculiarly set apart for God's service, though belonging like circumcision to an earlier state of things, had yet come, in great measure, to be connected with the Covenant made at Sinai. It was appointed to be a sign of that Covenant, and the reason for the day as a memorial of creation ceasing in course of time to be maintained among the Gentiles, the observance of it came ultimately to be regarded as a public testimony on the part of the Israelites of their adherence to the Covenant made with their fathers.

The need for a *change of day* in connection with the Sabbath under Christianity should now be the more apparent. The worship of God on the *seventh* day had been so blended with and merged into Judaism, that it could not serve as a proper sign and testimony to the world of the faith of the Gospel, and therefore without such a change as was actually made, one important end of this Divine institution and ordinance must otherwise have been lost. For the same reason that God abolished circumcision as the outward mark of His covenant people, He set aside the Judaical Sabbath as such; and for the same reason that He appointed baptism as the distinctive uniform of the Christian (Gal. 3:27) has He signalized the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath.

But if we go beyond Sinai right back to the Divine work of creation, a yet stronger reason will be found for this change in the Day of Rest. As a memorial of that work, the Sabbath cannot be now what it originally was, for sin has entered with its destroying power, and laid creation, as it were, in ruins. The once beautiful and glorious inheritance is now given up a prey to the spoiler; and a memorial of it, while it tells us indeed of God's first designs of goodness toward His creatures, tells us at the same time how those designs have been opposed, and nature's life and glory have been brought down within the gulf of death. We need then, for our peace and welfare, another work and covenant of God to repair the ruin of the first, and lay the foundation of a higher—even an imperishable glory.

A grander and more blessed production than the making of this material world has been achieved, even the bringing forth of a new creation, which cannot be marred by sin or Satan. The work of redemption immeasurably transcends in importance and value the work of the first creation, and hence it is most fitting that it should be signalized by a change in the Day of Rest to commemorate the rest of the Saviour from all His arduous and costly labours in the putting away of the sins of His people and His bringing in an everlasting righteousness for them. The transcendent work of Christ is therefore memorialized in the Sabbath by transferring it from the last to the first day of the week, for it was on *that* day the Redeemer rose triumphant from the grave as the Head of the new creation, the firstfruits of them that sleep, the prototype and pledge of a glorified humanity.

By the very act of His glorious exodus from the tomb, the Lord Jesus begets all who believe on His name unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away (1 Peter 1:3, 4). How appropriate, how delightful, then, the change made in connection with the Holy Day! Instead of seeking to take occasion from that change to impair or destroy the Sabbath, it should endear to us that blessed institution all the more. For it tells now, not so much of a paradise that has been lost, as of a better paradise that has been won; not so much of a covenant broken and a heritage spoiled, as of a covenant forever ratified by the blood of Christ and a kingdom that cannot be moved. If the corruptible

work and covenant of nature had by Divine appointment its Sabbatical sign and memorial, must not this higher work and covenant much rather have it?

“If we refuse now to enter into the fellowship of Christ’s rest by hallowing the day which He has set apart in His Church for spiritual rest and blessing, what is it in effect but to cut ourselves off from the hope of His redemption and declare our light esteem of His finished work? We conclude, therefore, that it is now, as it ever has been, the will of God that one whole day in seven should be kept holy to Himself; that since the resurrection of Christ, this has been Divinely appointed to be the first day of the week; and that this change, while it could do nothing to weaken the obligation of a proper Sabbath, was both necessary to make the observance of a Sabbath conducive to some of the ends for which it was appointed, and also gives to it the character which cannot fail greatly to enhance and endear its sacredness to every child of God” (P. Fairbairn, from whom much in the second part of this article is taken *verbatim*).—A.W.P.

DIVINE WISDOM.

So extremely desperate was the Fall of man, that it required the infinite and unsearchable wisdom of God Himself to find out a remedy against it. If the Lord should have proceeded thus far in mercy towards man and no farther—Thou art a wretched creature, and I am a righteous God; yea, so heavy is My wrath and so woeful thy condition, that I cannot choose but take compassion upon thee; and therefore I will put the matter into thine own hands. Requisite it is that My pity towards thee should not swallow up the respects to Mine own justice and honour, that My mercy should be a righteous and a wise mercy. Consult therefore together all ye children of men, and invent a way to reconcile My justice to one and another; set Me in a course to show you mercy without parting from Mine own right and denying the righteous demands of Mine offended justice, and I will promise you to observe it. I say, if the mercy of the Lord should have confined itself within these bounds, and referred the method of our redemption unto human discovery, we should forever have continued in a desperate state, everlastingly unable to conceive or so much as in fancy to frame unto ourselves a way of escape.

As the creatures before their being could have no thought or notion of their being educated out of nothing which they were before, so man fallen could not have the smallest conjecture or suspicion of any feasible way to deliver himself out of that misery into which he fell. If all the learning in the world were gathered into one man, and that man should employ all his time and study to frame unto himself the notions of a sixth or seventh sense, he would be as totally ignorant of the conclusion he sought at last as he was at first. For all human knowledge of natural things is wrought by a reflection upon those ideas which are impressions made from those senses we already use, and are indeed nothing else but a kind of notional existence of things in the memory of man wrought by an external and sensible perception of that real existence which they have in themselves.

And yet in this case a sixth or seventh sense would agree *in genere proximo*, and so have some kind of cognition with those we already enjoy. But a new covenant, a new life, a new faith, a new salvation, are things *toto genere* beyond the strain and sphere of nature. That two should become one, and yet remain two still, as God and man do in one Christ; that He who maketh should be one with the thing which Himself hath made; that He who is above all should humble Himself; that He who filleth all should empty Himself; that He who blesseth all should be Himself a curse; that He who ruleth all should be Himself a servant; that He who was the Prince of Life, by whom are all things and all things subsist, should Himself be dissolved and die; that mercy and justice should meet together, and kiss each other; that the debt should be paid, and yet pardoned; that the fault should be punished and yet remitted; that death like Samson's lion should have life and sweetness in it, and be used as an instrument to destroy itself; these and the like evangelical truths are mysteries which surpass the reach of all the princes of learning in the world. They are to be believed by a spiritual light, which was not so much as possible to a human reason.—Edward Reynolds, 1648.

“Lord when we bend before Thy throne
 And our confessions pour,
 Teach us to feel the sins we own
 And hate what we deplore.
 Our broken spirits pitying see,
 True penitence impart,

Then let a kindly flame from Thee
Beam hope on every heart.
When we disclose our wants in prayer
May we our will resign
And not a thought our bosoms share
That is not wholly Thine.
May faith each weak petition fill
And raise it to the skies,
And teach our hearts 'tis goodness still
That grants it, or denies."
—Edward Bickersteth.