

**Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 9**  
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**THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL.**

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). This verse contains a brief epitome of the whole plan of salvation. It states what God has done for the justification of His people, and therefore it is of special interest as presenting in concise form the testimony of the Spirit on that all-important subject. Every word in it calls for separate consideration, prayerful and most careful consideration, for an erroneous understanding of any of its clauses will involve us in fundamental and vile error. On the other hand, if the Lord be pleased to open up this verse to our spiritual perceptions, we cannot but be filled with wonderment and praise—with awe and fervent thanksgiving.

Last month we observed that our passage presents to us three things regarding God the Father, and now we are to notice the three things which it contains concerning the Son: these are His purity, His sufferings, and His merits. First, His ineffable innocence: He “knew no sin.” The immaculate purity of Christ is a most delightful subject of meditation, living as we are in an evil world and harassed by the sink of iniquity which still indwells us. Three inspired declarations need to be particularly weighed in this connection: “in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5), “who did no sin” (1 Peter 2:22), “who knew no sin.” Christ was the Lamb of God “without blemish and without spot”: as such He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

By His miraculous conception the Lord Christ was exempted from the contagion of original sin which defiles every fallen descendant of Adam. To Mary it was said, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: *therefore* also that *holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). The purity of Christ was immaculate, impeccable, immutable. He was free from any actual transgression: though the hottest of Satan’s fiery darts were shot at Him, yet there was not the slightest defect in His holiness: “The prince of this world cometh, and hath *nothing* in Me” (John 14:30). Though subjected to the greatest indignities, and the strongest provocations, yet, “He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.” To the worst of His enemies He issued this challenge: “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” (John 8:46).

But this expression “who *knew* no sin” goes even further than those we have glanced at above, for it conveys far more than the bare assertion that Christ was sinless: it places Him at the greatest possible distance from sin. This emphatic assertion that He “knew no sin” can only be rightly understood as we balance it against the opposing clause—“that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Now we “know” righteousness only as something which is entirely foreign to our nature as fallen creatures, and have no subjective apprehension of it until we are justified by faith: in like manner Christ “knew” sin only as something which was absolutely foreign to His nature, as something entirely apart from Himself, as something which as the Holy One He utterly abhorred, and of which He had no subjective consciousness until our sins were laid upon Him.

The incalculable *sufferings* of Christ are here summarized in the words, “made to be sin for us,” which is a comprehensive expression including the whole of what the Saviour was called upon to endure while making atonement for His people. But before examining this unspeakably solemn word let it first be pointed out that, to be without sin was an in-

dispensable qualification of Christ's becoming our sin-bearer—dimly foreshadowed under the ceremonial law where only animals that were, “without blemish” could be used for sacrificial purposes. Our High Priest had to be entirely without any personal sin in order to offer an unspotted sacrifice to satisfy God's justice and merit His favour. Second, it must also be most clearly understood that in being “made sin for us” the immaculate nature of the Redeemer underwent no change, nor was the holiness of His Person sullied to the slightest degree. He took upon Him neither the taint nor pollution of sin: His peerless perfections and glory remained unspotted throughout.

“He hath made Him (to be) sin for us.” What an amazing statement is this, and how unspeakably solemn. Who with the fear of God in his heart would ever have dared to make such a predication were he not first assured of its verity from Holy Writ: that the Holy One should be “made sin.” This does not mean that Christ was made sin experimentally, but rather judicially; not by impartation but by imputation. The Greek word which is here rendered “made” (*poieo*) is the one found in, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19)—something which they were not formerly and naturally. In Mark 3:14 the same word is translated “and He *ordained* twelve that they should be with Him.” It occurs again in connection with the Saviour in “God hath *made* that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), which refers not to His nature and condition, but to His status and position.

The usage of “*poieo*” in the above passages helps us to gather the force of it in “He hath made Him to be sin”: God ordained and ordered that His Son should be made sin—He *appointed* that Christ should be legally *constituted* such. But what is meant by God's having constituted Christ “sin”? To be a sin-offering say some, to bear its penalty say others. But neither of these explanations go back far enough: nothing could be made an expiatory sacrifice unless and until sin had been imputed to it; and punishment necessarily presupposes guilt, for the innocent cannot be justly penalized. The key which unlocks this mystery is found in the words “the Lord hath laid on Him (the Mediator) the iniquity (not of “all” but) of *us* all” (Isa. 53:6). The *guilt* of all the sins of God's people was charged to the account of the Redeemer, and the Law dealt with Him accordingly.—A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

### 14. *Prayer*: Matthew 6:14, 15.

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14, 15). These verses have received scant attention from most of those who have written on the Lord’s Prayer. This ought not to be, for they form a most important appendix to and round the teaching of our Lord begun at verse 6. It is significant to observe that the fifth petition in the Family Prayer is the only one singled out by Christ for specific comment—probably because the duty enforced in it is the most painful of all to flesh and blood. But however distasteful the contents of these verses may be to our sinful hearts, that is no reason why they should be virtually shelved by most of the commentators.

Timely indeed are the brief remarks of Matthew Henry thereon: “If we pray in anger, we have reason to fear that God will answer us in anger. What reason is it that God should forgive us the talents (huge sums) we are indebted to Him, if we forgive not our brethren the pence they are indebted to us? Christ came into the world as the great Peace-Maker: not only to reconcile us to God, but to one another; and in this we must comply with Him. It is a great presumption and of dangerous consequences for anyone to make a light matter of that which Christ lays such a stress upon. Men’s passions must not frustrate God’s Word.” Far too weighty and momentous are these solemn and searching declarations of the Lord Jesus to be summarily dismissed with a brief and light notice of them.

It was the comparative failure of Christian expositors in the past to adequately explain and enforce the teaching of Christ in the verses now before us which made it so much easier for modern errorists to foist their evil perversions on the uninstructed and unwary. For example, take the following footnote from the “Scofield Reference Bible”: “This is legal ground. Compare Ephesians 4:32 which is grace. Under the Law forgiveness was conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.” This is a fair sample of the vicious method followed by “Dispensationalists,” who (under the pretense of “rightly dividing the Word of Truth”) delight in pitting the Old Testament against the New, and lowering the standard of Christianity, presenting a fictitious “grace” which does not “reign through righteousness” (Rom. 5:21). Let us briefly examine this statement of Scofield’s, which has misled thousands.

By saying that because our receiving Divine forgiveness is dependent upon our forgiving those who wrong us is “legal ground,” attempt is made to set aside the Lord’s positive declaration. In the added statement, “Compare Ephesians 4:32 which is grace” we are asked to believe that Matthew 6:14, 15 pertains not at all to this Christian era. This is made quite plain in what follows where this “renowned Bible teacher” opposes the one to the other. “Under the Law forgiveness was conditioned upon a like spirit in us, under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.” Such a declaration betrays the mental confusion of its author. Under no dispensation has God ever bestowed mercy upon any who maintained a vindictive spirit, nor does He now: were He to do so, it would not be “grace,” but a disgrace to His holiness. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament economy penitent souls were pardoned for

*Christ's* sake, as truly as believers are today. There is no conflict between the Law and the Gospel: the one is the handmaid of the other.

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” What analogy is there between our forgiving of others and God’s forgiving us? Let us begin with the *negative* side. First, it is *not* because our forgiving those who wrong us is in any sense or degree a *meritorious* act which deserves well at the hands of God. The meritorious ground on which God pardons our sins is the atonement of Christ, and that alone. Our best performances are imperfect, and in no way proportionate to the mercies we receive from God. What proportion is there between God’s pardoning of us and our pardoning of others, either with respect to the parties interested in the action, the subject matter, the manner of performance or the issues of the action? God has laid a law upon us that we should forgive others, and compliance therewith is simply discharging our duty, and not something by which we bring the Lord into debt to us.

Second, it is *not a rule* so that our forgiving others should be a pattern of forgiving to God. “Thy will be done in earth *as* it is in Heaven” does denote a conformity of the one to the other; but “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” is not a pattern or rule. We are to be imitators of God, but He does not imitate us in pardoning offenders—it would fare ill with us indeed if God were to forgive us no better than we forgive one another. God is matchless in all His works and all His ways. Let it be duly noted that when He declares, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8, 9) it is specifically said in connection with His “abundant pardon” (see verse 7).

Third, nor do these words, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you” signify *a priority of order*, as though our acts had the precedence of God’s, or as if we could heartily forgive others before God had shown mercy to us. No—in all acts of love God is first: His mercy to us is the cause of our mercy to others. In the great parable on forgiveness (Matt. 18:23-35), which forms the best commentary on the verses now before us, God’s forgiving us is the motive of our forgiving: “I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst Me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” (vv. 32, 33). So again—“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32)—in that manner, according to that example.

Turning now to the *positive* side. “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Very searching indeed are these words, constituting a severe test of discipleship, a test which excludes from the ranks of God’s children those professors who cherish a spirit of malignity and revenge, refusing to forgive those who injure them. Unless our pride be truly broken by a sense of sin so that we are not only willing to forgive others, but also rejoice in those opportunities for exercising (in some small degree at least) that lovingkindness which we ourselves stand in such sore need of from God, then we are not really penitent in heart and therefore cannot be pardoned ourselves. If our prayers are to be acceptable unto God we must “lift up holy hands, *without wrath*” (1 Tim. 2:8).

First, our forgiveness of others is a *condition* or necessary qualification if we are to receive the continued pardon of God. “For if we forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you”: these two are definitely joined together and must not

be separated by us. Divine forgiveness always presupposes our repentance: it is not bestowed on that account, yet it is inseparably connected with it. Unless we forgive those who injure us we are in no moral condition ourselves to receive the mercy of God. We have no Scriptural warrant whatever to expect the Divine pardon while we refuse to pardon those who have trespassed against us. It is quite wrong to limit this by saying that we cannot expect the *comfort* of God's pardon: so long as we indulge implacable resentment it is presumptuous for us to hope for Divine mercy.

Second, as intimated above, our forgiveness of others is a *mark* or sign that we ourselves have been pardoned of God. "Hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3) was our condition by nature; but if by grace we have drunk of the blessed spirit of the Redeemer then shall we, like He (Luke 23:34), pray for our enemies. Said the beloved Apostle, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering" (1 Tim. 1:16). Where the grace of God has wrought a miracle in the human heart graciousness is the inevitable effect. Reconciliation with God is made manifest by a conciliatory spirit to our fellows. If God has softened our hearts, how can we be hard and mercilessly exacting toward others? "There is none so tender to others as they which have received mercy themselves: that know how gently God hath dealt with them" (Thomas Manton).

Third, the joining together of our forgiving of others with God's forgiving of us is in order to show this is a *duty* incumbent upon those who are pardoned. God has laid this necessity upon us. Every time we beg His pardon we are to remind ourselves most solemnly of this duty and bind ourselves to it in the sight of God. So that when we pray, "Forgive us our debts," we are required to add, "as we forgive our debtors." It is a definite undertaking on our part, a formal promise which we make to God: His showing of mercy to us will incline us to show mercy unto others. In all earnest requests we are to bind ourselves to the corresponding duties. In asking for our daily bread we pledge ourselves to labour for it. In asking that we may not be led into temptation, we agree not to place a stumblingblock before others.

Fourth, it is an argument inspiring confidence in God's pardoning mercy. We, who have still so much of the old leaven of revenge left in us, find that the receiving of a spark of grace enkindles in our hearts a readiness to forgive those who injure us, what may we not expect from God! Clearly this is what is urged in, "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4): if we who have so little grace find it possible to be magnanimous, how much more so shall the God of all grace exceed the creature in this! The same kind of reasoning was employed by Christ in His, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him" (Matt. 7:11). Since fallen man is moved with affection toward his weak and needy offspring, certainly the Father of Mercies will not be indifferent to our wants.

We must next inquire what is meant by our forgiving those who trespass against us. Before answering this question in detail it should be pointed out that we can only forgive those injuries which are directly against ourselves, for none but God can forgive those which are against Himself—He alone can remit that punishment which is due to the transgressor for the violation of His Law. It should also be premised that we are not required to forgive those injuries done to us which constitute a flagrant violation of the laws of the land, whereby the offender has committed a serious crime, for it belongs not

to a private person to condone evil doing or to obstruct the course of justice. Yet if we have recourse to human courts for the redress of wrongs, it must not be in a spirit of malice, but only for the glory of God and the public good.

What is meant by our forgiving others? First, forbearing ourselves and withholding revenge. "Say not, I will do to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (Prov. 24:29). Corrupt nature thirsts for retaliation, but grace must suppress it. If someone has slandered us, that does not warrant us to slander them. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32): we rule our spirit when we overcome our passion. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21), for this will shame the offender if his conscience be not utterly calloused. When David had Saul at an advantage and forbore any act of revenge against him, Saul acknowledged, "Thou art more righteous than I" (1 Sam. 24:17).

Second, Christians are required not only to forbear the avenging of themselves, but actually to pardon those who have wronged them. There must be the laying aside of all anger and hatred, and the exercise of love toward my neighbour, remembering that by nature I am no better than the offender (Gal. 6:1). If we have genuinely pardoned the one who has injured us, we shall earnestly desire that God will pardon him too, as Stephen prayed for his enemies, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). This forgiveness must be sincere and from the heart. When Joseph's brethren submitted themselves to him, he not only remitted their offenses, but "comforted them, and spake kindly unto them" (Gen. 50:21).

Third, we must be ready to perform all the offices of love unto those who have wronged us, if the offending one be not a brother in Christ, yet is he still your fellow creature. Nor must you so magnify his faults as to be blind to his compensating virtues. We are required to do good unto those that hate us (Luke 6:27) and to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us (Matt. 5:44). Though Miriam had wronged Moses, yet he prayed to the Lord for her forgiveness and healing (Num. 12:13). And surely it is fitting that we who need mercy ourselves should show mercy unto others. It is a general rule that we should do as we would be done unto. How we need to pray for more grace if we are to be gracious unto others!

But are we required to forgive offenders absolutely and unconditionally, whether they express contrition or not? Certainly not. A holy God does not require us to condone evil-doing and countenance sin. The teaching of our Lord on this point is crystal clear: first we are bidden to seek out the offender, privately and meekly, and expostulate with him, endeavouring to make him see that he has displeased the Lord and wronged his own soul more than he has us (Matt. 5:23, 24; 18:15). Second, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and *if* he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saving, I *repent*; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4). But suppose the offender evidences no sign of repentance? Even then, we must not harbour any malice or any revenge, yet we are not to act as freely and familiarly as before. Third, we are to pray for him.

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Unspeakably solemn is this, and each of us needs to diligently search his heart in the light of it. Let us bear in mind that other declaration of Christ's, "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be meas-

ured to you again" (Matt. 7:2). God's government is a reality, and He sees to it that whatsoever we sow that do we also reap. The same truth, in principle, is enunciated in, "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13). Many an earnest prayer is offered which never reaches the ear of God. Why is it that such a verse as, "For He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy" (James 2:13) has no place in the preaching of our day? How much that is distasteful to flesh and blood is withheld by men-pleasers! Such will never receive the Master's "Well done, thou good and *faithful* servant."

It will be seen, then, that the passage we have been considering presents a very real test of discipleship. On the one hand it shows that if we are merciful to others we shall ourselves "obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). On the other hand it teaches that if we retain malice and hatred against those who injure us, then is the hypocrisy of our Christian profession plainly exposed. How necessary it is that we diligently examine our hearts and test ourselves at this point. As a guide therein, ponder before God the following queries: Do I secretly rejoice when I hear of any calamity befalling one who has wronged me? If so, I certainly have not forgiven him. Do I retain in my memory the wrongs suffered and upbraid the transgressor with them? Or, assuming he has repented, am I willing and anxious to do whatever I can to help him and promote his interests?

It is abundantly clear from all that has been before us that God's pardon of our sins and the reformation of our lives go together: the one can only be known by the other. The more our hearts and lives are regulated by a Christ-like spirit, the clearer our evidence that we are new creatures in Him. It is utterly vain for me to believe that I have received the Divine pardon if I refuse to forgive those who injure me. True, it is often difficult to forget the wrongs we have forgiven, and the injuries we have received may still rankle within us. The flesh is yet in us and indwelling sin mars all the actings of grace. Yet if we honestly strive to banish ill will and seek to cherish a meek disposition toward our enemies, we may comfort ourselves that God will be gracious unto us, for His love is infinitely superior to ours. If our hearts condemn us not then do we have confidence toward Him.—A.W.P.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

### 9. At Zarephath.

In that which is now to be before us we are to behold how the Prophet conducted himself in quite different surroundings and circumstances from those which have previously engaged our attention. Hitherto we have seen something of how he acquitted himself in public: his courage and spiritual dignity before Ahab; and also how he acted in private—his life in secret before God by the brook: obedient unto the word of the Lord, patiently waiting His next marching orders. But here the Spirit grants us a view of how Elijah conducted himself in the home of the widow at Zarephath, revealing as it does most blessedly the sufficiency of Divine grace for God's servants and people in every situation in which they may find themselves. Alas, how often the servant of God who is uncompromising in public and faithful in his secret devotions, fails lamentably in the domestic sphere, the family circle. This should not be; nor was it so with Elijah, by God's grace.

That to which we have just alluded calls perhaps for a few remarks, which we offer not by way of extenuation but of explanation. Why is it that the servant of God is often seen to far less advantage in the home than he is in the pulpit or the closet? In the first place, as he goes forth to discharge his public duties he is keyed up to do battle against the Enemy; but he returns home with his nervous energy spent, to relax and recuperate. Then it is that he is more easily upset and irritated by comparative trifles. In the second place, in his public ministry he is conscious that he is opposing the powers of evil, but in the family circle he is surrounded by those who love him, and is more off his guard, failing to realize that Satan may use his friends to gain an advantage over him. Third, conscientious faithfulness in public may have stimulated his pride, and a thorn in the flesh—the painful realization of sad failure in the home—may be necessary to humble him. Yet there is no more justification for God-dishonouring conduct in the domestic circle than in the pulpit.

Last month we reached the point where Elijah—in response to Jehovah's orders—had left his retirement at Cherith, had crossed the desert and had duly arrived at the gates of Zarephath, where the Lord had (secretly) commanded a widow woman to sustain him. He encountered her at the entrance of the town, though under circumstances which presented a most unpromising appearance to carnal sight. Instead of this woman joyfully welcoming the Prophet, she dolefully spoke of the impending death of herself and son. Instead of being amply furnished to minister unto Elijah, she tells him that “a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse” was all she had left. What a testing of faith! How unreasonable it seemed that the man of God should expect sustenance under her roof. No more unreasonable than that Noah should be required to build an ark before there was any rain, still less any signs of a flood: no more unreasonable than that Israel should be required to simply walk round and round the walls of Jericho. The path of obedience can only be trodden as faith is in exercise.

“And Elijah said, Fear not: go and do as thou hast said” (1 Kings 17:13). What a gracious word was this to quieten the poor widow's heart! Be not afraid of the consequences, either to yourself or to your son, in making use of the means to hand, scant though they be. “But make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son” (v. 13). What a severe testing was this! Was ever a poor widow so sorely tried, before or since? To make him a cake “first” was surely, in her extreme circumstances, one of the hardest commands ever given. Did it not appear to issue

from the very essence of selfishness? Did either the laws of God or of man require a sacrifice like this? God has never bidden us do more than love our neighbour as ourself, nowhere has He bidden us to love him *better*. But here “make *me* a cake *first*”!

“For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” (v. 14). Ah, *that* made all the difference: that removed the sting from the request, showing there was no selfishness inspiring the same. She was asked for a portion of that little which she had remaining, but Elijah tells her she need not hesitate to bestow it, for although the case seemed desperate, God would take care of her and of her son. Observe with what implicit confidence the Prophet spoke: there was no uncertainty, but positive and unwavering assurance that their supply should not diminish. Ah, Elijah had learned a valuable lesson at Cherith—learned it experimentally: he had *proved* the faithfulness of Jehovah by the brook, and therefore was he now qualified to quieten the fears and comfort the heart of this poor widow—compare 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 which reveals the secret of all effective ministry.

Observe the particular title here accorded Deity. The woman had said, “As the LORD thy God liveth” (1 Kings 7:12), but this was not sufficient. Elijah declared, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel”: this Gentile must be made to realize the humbling truth that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). “The LORD God of Israel”: of whose wondrous works you must have heard so much. The One who made a footstool of the haughty Pharaoh, who brought His people through the Red Sea dry-shod, who miraculously sustained them for 40 years in the wilderness, and who subdued the Canaanites for them. Such an One may surely be trusted for our daily bread. The “LORD God of Israel” is He whose promise never fails, for “the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man that He should repent” or change His mind (1 Sam. 15:29). Such an One may be safely relied upon.

“For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth” (1 Kings 17:14). God gave her His word of promise to rest upon: could she rely upon it? Would she really trust Him? Note how definite was the promise: it was not merely, God will not suffer thee to starve, or will surely supply all your need; rather was it as though the Prophet had said, The meal in *thy* barrel shall not diminish nor the oil in *thy* cruse dry up. And if our faith be a Divinely-sustained one it will cause us to trust in God’s promise to commit ourselves unreservedly to His care, and to do good unto our fellow creatures. But observe how faith must *continue* in exercise: no new barrel of meal was promised or furnished: just an undiminished “handful”—seemingly a very inadequate quantity for the family, but quite sufficient with God. “Until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth” evidenced the firm faith of the Prophet himself.

“And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she and he and her house did eat many days” (v. 15). Who can forbear exclaiming, O woman great is thy faith! She might have advanced many excuses to the Prophet’s request, especially as he was a stranger to her, but great as the test was, her faith in the Lord was equal to it. Her simple trust that God would take care of them overcame all the objections of carnal reason. Does she not remind us of another Gentile woman, the Syro-Phoenician, a descendant of the idolatrous Canaanites, who long afterwards welcomed the appearance of Christ to the borders of Tyre, and who sought His aid on behalf of her demon distressed daughter?

With astonishing faith she overcame every obstacle, and obtained a portion of the children's bread in the healing of her daughter (Matt. 15:28). Would that such cases moved us to cry from our hearts, "Lord, increase our faith," for none but He who bestows faith can increase it.

"And she and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which He spake by Elijah" (1 Kings 17:15, 16). She was no loser by her generosity. Her little supply of meal and oil was but sufficient for a single meal and then she and her son must die. But her willingness to minister unto God's servant brought her enough, not only for many days, but for several years. She gave Elijah of the best of what she had and for her kindness to him God kept her household clear through the famine. How true it is that, "He that receiveth a Prophet in the name of a Prophet shall receive a Prophet's reward" (Matt. 10:41). But all of God's people are not granted the privilege of succouring a Prophet, yet they may God's poor. Is it not written, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17)? And again, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psa. 41:1). God will be no man's Debtor.

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." Here again we have exemplified the fact that the receiving of God's blessing and obtaining of food (in figure, spiritual food) is the result of *obedience*. This woman complied with the request of God's servant and great was her reward. Are you, my reader, fearful of the future? Are you afraid that when strength fails and old age comes you may be left without the necessities of life? Then suffer us to remind you that there is no need whatever for such fears. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (temporal necessities) shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). "O fear the LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him" (Psa. 34:9). "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa. 84:11). But note well that each of these promises is *conditional*: your business is to give God the first place in your life, to fear, obey and honour Him in all things, and in return He guarantees your bread and water shall be sure.

Is there a reader inclined to reply, Such wholesome counsel is easier to receive than to act on, to be reminded of God's promises than to rely upon the same. Someone may be disposed to say, Ah, you know not how distressing are my circumstances, how dark the outlook, how sorely Satan is injecting doubts into my mind. True, yet however desperate your case may be, we would earnestly beg you to think upon the widow of Zarephath: it is most unlikely that your situation is anything like as extreme as hers, yet she perished not of starvation. He who puts God first will always find Him with him at the last. Things which seem to be acting against us, work together for our good in His wondrous hands. Whatever be your need, dear friend, forget not Elijah's God.

"And she and he and her house did eat many days." Here we see Elijah dwelling safely in the humble abode of this poor widow. Though the fare was frugal, yet it was sufficient to preserve life in the body. There is no hint that God provided any variation of diet during those "many days," nor any intimation that the Prophet became dissatisfied with being required to eat the same food over so long a period. This is where we obtain our first glimpse of how he conducted himself within the family circle. Blessedly did he

exemplify that Divine precept, "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). And from where does such contentment proceed? From a submissive and peaceful heart which rests in God: subject to His sovereign pleasure, satisfied with the portion He is pleased to allot us, seeing *His* hand both in providing and in withholding.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." Certainly the widow had no cause to complain of the severe testing to which her faith had been put. God, who sent His Prophet to board with her, paid well for his table—by providing her family with food while her neighbours were starving, and by granting her the company and instruction of His servant. Who can tell what blessing came to her soul under the edifying conversation of Elijah and from the efficacy of his prayers? She was of a humane and generous disposition, ready to relieve the misery of others and minister to the needs of God's servants; and her liberality was returned to her a hundredfold. Unto the merciful, God shows mercy, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." Let us now endeavour to look higher, lest we miss the lovely type which is to be found here. The "meal" is certainly a Divinely-selected figure of Christ, the "corn of wheat" that died (John 12:24), being ground between the upper and nether millstones of Divine judgment that He might be unto us the "Bread of life." This is clear from the first few chapters of Leviticus, where we have the five great offerings appointed for Israel, which set forth the Person and work of the Redeemer; the Meal offering of "fine flour" (Lev. 2) portraying the perfections of His humanity. It is equally clear that the "oil" is an emblem of the Holy Spirit in His anointing, enlightening and sustaining operations. It is a most blessed line of study to trace through the Scriptures the typical references of the "oil."

As the little family at Zarephath were not sustained by meal or oil alone, but the two in conjunction, so the believer is not sustained spiritually without both Christ and the Holy Spirit. We could not feed upon Christ, yea, we would never feel our need of so doing, were it not for the gracious influences of the Spirit of God. The One is as indispensable to us as the Other: Christ for us, the Spirit in us; the One maintaining our cause on high, the Other ministering to us down here. The Spirit is here to "testify" of Christ (John 15:26), yea, to "glorify" Him (John 16:14), and therefore did the Saviour add, "He shall receive of Mine and show it unto you"—is not this why the "meal" (three times over) is mentioned first in the type? Nor is this the only passage where we see the two types combined: again and again in the beautiful prefiguration of the Old Testament we read of the "oil" being placed upon the blood (Exo. 29:21; Lev. 14:14; etc.).

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." There was a steady increase and supply of both according to the mighty power of God working a continuous miracle: is there not a close parallel between this and the Saviour's supernatural increasing of the five barley loaves and the two small fishes, while the disciples were distributing and the multitude eating (Matt. 14:19, 20)? But again we would look from the type to the Antitype. The meal continued undiminished, the supply unabated, and the meal pointed to Christ as the Nourisher of our souls. The provision which God has made for His people in the Lord Jesus remains the same throughout the centuries: we may come to Him again and again and though we receive from Him "grace for grace" yet His "fullness" (John 1:16) continues the Same "yesterday and today and forever." "Neither

did the cruse of oil fail” foreshadowed the grand truth that the Holy Spirit is with us to the very end of our pilgrimage (Eph. 4:30).

But let us point out again that God did not give a new barrel of meal and cruse of oil unto this family at Zarephath, nor did He fill to the brim the old one. There is another important lesson for us in this. God gave them sufficient food for their daily use, but not a whole year’s supply in advance or even a week’s provision all at once. In like manner, there is no such thing as our laying up for ourselves a stock of grace for future use. We have to go constantly to Christ for fresh supplies of grace. The Israelites were expressly forbidden to hoard up the manna: they had to go out and gather it anew each morning. We cannot procure sufficient sustenance for our souls on the Sabbath to last us throughout the week, but must feed on God’s Word each morning. So, too, though we have been regenerated by the Spirit once and for all, yet He renews us in the inner man “day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

“According to the word of the LORD, which He spake by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:16). This was illustrative and demonstrative of a vital principle: no word of His shall fall to the ground, but all things “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began”—(Acts 3:21)—shall surely be accomplished. This is both solemn and blessed. Solemn, because the threatenings of Holy Writ are not idle ones, but the faithful warnings of Him that cannot lie. Just as surely as Elijah’s declaration, “there shall be no dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1) was fulfilled to the letter, so will the Most High make good every judgment He has announced against the wicked. Blessed, because as truly as the widow’s meal and oil failed not according to His word through Elijah, so shall every promise made to His saints yet receive its perfect accomplishment. The unimpeachable veracity, unchanging faithfulness, and all-mighty power of God to make good His Word is the impregnable foundation on which faith may securely rest.—A.W.P.

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

### 4. *Its Root.*

As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no voice or pen can adequately portray the awful state of wretchedness and woe into which sin has cast guilty man. It has separated him from God and so has severed him from the only Source of holiness and true happiness. It has ruined him in spirit and soul and body. By the Fall, man not only plunged himself into a state of infinite guilt from which there is no deliverance except sovereign grace unite him with the Mediator, but by his apostasy man has lost his holiness and is wholly corrupt and under the dominion of dispositions or lusts which are directly contrary to God and His law (Rom. 8:7). The Fall has brought man into love of sin and hatred of God. The corruption of man's being is so great and so entire that he will never truly repent or even have any right exercises toward God and His Law unless and until he is supernaturally renewed by the Holy Spirit.

If any reader is inclined to think we have just painted too dark a picture or have exaggerated the case of the fallen creature, then we ask him to carefully ponder the second half of Romans 7, and note how human nature is there represented as so totally depraved as to be utterly unable not merely to keep God's Law perfectly, but unable to do *anything* agreeable to it. "The law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth *no* good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (vv. 14, 18, 23). How completely at variance is that language from the sentiments which prevail in Christendom today! Paul, that most eminent Christian, nothing behind the chief of the Apostles, at the very time of penning this Epistle, when he considered what he was in himself, confessed that he was "sold under sin."

The Apostle's phrase, "*in my flesh* there dwelleth no good thing," as may be seen by tracing it through the New Testament, imports "in me by nature"—there is nothing in me naturally good. But ere proceeding further let us seek to carefully define what is signified by the term "the natural man" or "man by nature." It is not meant the human nature itself, or man as a tri-partite being of spirit and soul and body, for then we should include the Lord Jesus Christ, who truly and really assumed human nature, becoming the Son of man. No, this term connotes not man as *created*, but man as *corrupted*. God did not in creation plant in us a principle of contrariety to Himself, for He fashioned man after His own image and likeness. He made him upright, holy. It was our defection from Him which plunged us into such immeasurable wretchedness and woe—which polluted and defiled all the springs of our being and corrupted all our faculties.

As the result of the Fall man is the inveterate enemy of God, not only because of what he does, but because of what he now is in himself. "What kind of enmity this is. First, I understand it of nature, not of actions only. Every action of a natural man is an enemy's action, but not an action of enmity. A toad doth not envenom every spire of grass it crawls upon nor poison everything it toucheth, but its nature is poisonous. Certainly every man's nature is worse than his actions: as waters are purest at the fountain, and poison most pernicious in the mass, so is enmity in the heart. And its waters partake of the mineral vein they run through, so the actions of a wicked man are tintured with the enmity they spring from, but the mass and strength of this is lodged in his *nature*. There is in all our natures such a diabolical contrariety to God, that if God should leave a man

to the current of his own heart, it would overflow in all kinds of wickedness” (Stephen Charnock).

It is quite true that their fearful enmity against God is less openly displayed by some than others, but this is not because they are any better in themselves than those who cast off all pretenses of decency. No, their moderation in wickedness is to be attributed unto the greater restraints which God places upon them, either by the secret workings of His Spirit upon their hopes and fears or by His external providences—such as education, religious instruction, the subduing influence of the pious. But none is born into this world with the slightest spark of love to God in him. “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent” (Psa. 58:3, 4)—the poison of a serpent is radically the same in all of its species.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). These words make it clear that inherent corruption is derived to us by birth. This is evident from the remainder of the verse: “and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The “spirit” which is begotten differs from the Spirit who is the Begetter, and signifies that new creation of holiness which is wrought in the soul and inherent therein, and therefore it is called “the seed of God” (1 John 3:9). As, then, “spirit” here unquestionably notes out the new nature or principle of holiness, so the “flesh” in John 3:6 stands for the old nature or principle of sin. This is further established by Galatians 5:17: “For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things which ye would”: “flesh” and “spirit” are there put as two inherent qualities conveyed by two several births, and so are therein opposed. That the “flesh” refers to our very nature as corrupt is seen from the fact that it has “works” or fruits. The flesh is a principle from which operations issue, as buds from a root.

The *scope* of Christ in John 3 shows that “flesh” has reference to the corruption of our *nature*. His evident design in those verses was to show what imperative need there is for fallen man to be regenerated. Now regeneration is nothing else but a working of new spiritual dispositions in the whole man, called there “spirit,” without which it is impossible that he should enter the kingdom of God: “for,” says Christ, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” by which He must make it the direct contrary to the spirit of holiness which is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. Had we derived only guilt from Adam we should need only justification; but since we also derived corruption of nature we need regeneration, too.

There is, then, in every man born into this world a mass of corruption that inheres or sticks to him, which is the principle of all his activities, whence they proceed; yea, which may justly be termed his “nature,” for it is the predominant quality which is in all and directs all that issues from him. Let us now proceed to *the proof* of this compound assertion. First, it is a mass of corruption, for that which our Lord called “flesh” in John 3:6 is denominated “the old *man* which is corrupt” by His Apostle in Ephesians 4:22. Observe carefully what is clearly implied by this term, and see again how perfectly one part of Scripture harmonizes with another. “Corruption” necessarily denotes something which was previously *good*, and so it is with man. God made him righteous, now he is defiled. Instead of having a holy soul, it is depraved; instead of an immortal body, it has within it even now the seeds of putrefaction.

Second, we have said that this corruption sticks or cleaves to man's very nature. It is expressly said to dwell within him: "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that *dwelleth in me*. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:17, 18). Man, then, has not only acts of sin which are transient, which come from him and go away, but he has a root and spring of sin dwelling within, residing in him, not only adjacent to but actually inhabiting him. It is not simply our ways and works, but "*the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.*" Nor is this something which we acquire through association with the wicked, but rather that which we bring with us into the world: "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child" (Prov. 22:15).

Third, we have stated that this indwelling corruption is the predominant principle of all the actions of unregenerate man, that from which all proceeds. Surely this is clear from, "Now the *works of the flesh* are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, etc." (Gal. 5:19-21). The "flesh" is here said to have works or fruits, and this is a quality in man's nature bearing the same—note "hatred" and "wrath" are not deeds of the body, but dispositions of the soul and affections of the heart; so that the "flesh" cannot be restricted unto our physical structure. This evil principle or corruption is Divinely denominated a "root": "Lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood" (Deut. 29:18 and cf. Heb. 12:15). It is a root which brings forth "gall and wormwood," that is, the bitter fruits of sin, yea it is said to "bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5).

Fourth, we have affirmed that there is a *mass* of this corruption which thoroughly affects and defiles man's being. This is confirmed by the fact that in Colossians 2:11 it is called a "body," which has many members: "in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting *off the body* of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." This body of the sins of the flesh is of abounding dimensions, a body which has internal and external, gross and more secret lusts, such as atheism, contempt and hatred of God, which is not fully perceived by man until the Holy Spirit pierces him to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. That this corruption lies in the very *nature* of man appears from the Psalmist's statement, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (51:5). David is there confessing the *spring* from which his great act of sin sprang: I have not only committed the awful act of adultery, but there is even in my inward parts (cf. v. 6.) sin defiling me from the moment I was conceived.

Finally, we have declared that this corruption may, in a very real sense, be termed the *nature* of man. Once more we appeal to John 3:6 in proof, for there it is predicated in the abstract, which implies more than a simple quality, even such as explains what is the very definition and nature of man. The Lord Jesus did not say merely, "that which is born of the flesh is fleshly," but "is flesh." Therein Christ framed a new definition of man, in excess of any the philosophers have framed of him. Philosophers define man to be a rational animal, but the Son of God announces him to be flesh, that is, sin and corruption contrary to grace and holiness, this being his very nature in the sight of God as a fallen creature. The very fact that this definition of man's nature is, as it were, in the abstract, argues that it is a thing *inherent* in us. But let us enlarge a little upon this point.

Definitions are taken from things bred in nature, and none but essential properties are ingredients in definitions. Definitions are taken from the most predominant qualities. Sin-

ful corruption is a more predominant principle in man's nature than is reason itself, for it not only guides reason, but it resides in every part and faculty of man, as reason does not. Yea, this corruption is so essential and predominant and so universally diffused through the whole man that there is a mutual predication between man and it. As in John 3:6 the whole of man's nature is designated "flesh," so in Ephesians 4:22 this corruption is called *man*: "put off the old *man*, which is corrupt." Obviously we cannot "put off" our essential substance or discard our very selves, but that which is sinful and foul. It is called "the *old man*" because inherited from Adam and because it is contrasted from our new nature.

Man's nature, then, which has become corrupt and termed flesh, is a bundle of folly and vileness, and it is this which renders him totally impotent to all good. Thus Scripture speaks of "the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21) and declares men to be "the servants (Greek "slaves") of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19). Slow as any are to acknowledge this humbling truth, yet the solemn fact that the very nature of man is corrupt and defiles everything which issues from him, is capable of clear and abundant demonstration. First, the human creature sins *from earliest years*: the first acts which evidence reason has sin also mingled with it. Take any child and observe him closely, and it will be found that as soon as the first dawns of reason appear they are corrupt: they express reason only in sinning—as in rebellion when thwarted, readiness to please themselves, by doing harm to others, excusing themselves by lying, pride of apparel.

"To speak my mind freely: I do confess it is my opinion that children come polluted with sin into the world, and that oftentimes the sins of their youth—especially while they are very young—are rather by virtue of indwelling sin than by examples that are set before them by others: not but what they *learn* to sin by example, too, but example is not the root but rather the temptation to wickedness" (John Bunyan). How can we believe otherwise when our Lord has expressly affirmed, "For from within, out of the heart of man (and not "from association with degenerates") proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23). It is true that evil habits may be acquired through contact with evil-doers, but they are the occasion and not the radical cause of the same.

This pollution of our very nature, this indwelling corruption, holds men in complete bondage to its awful sway, rendering them utterly impotent unto that which is good. In further proof of this let us revert again to Romans 7. In his explanation of why he was unable to perform that obedience which God required, the Apostle said, "I find then a *law*, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to *the law of sin* which is in my members" (vv. 21-23). Indwelling sin is here called "a law." Literally, a "law" is a moral rule which directs and commands, being enforced with rewards and penalties, which impels us subjects to do the things ordered and avoid the things forbidden. Figuratively, the term "law" is used of an inward principle that moves and inclines constantly unto action. As the law of gravity draws all objects to their centre, so sin is an effectual principle and power inclining unto actions according to its own evil nature.

When the Apostle says, "I see another law in my members" (that is, in addition to the principle of grace and holiness communicated at the new birth) he refers to the presence and being of indwelling sin; when he adds "bringing me into captivity" he signifies its

power and efficacy. Indwelling sin is a “law” even *in* believers, though not *to* them. Paul said, “I *find*, then, a law of sin”: it was a discovery which he had made as a regenerate man. From painful experience he found there was that in him which hindered his communion with God, which thwarted his deepest longings to live a sinless life. The operations of Divine grace preserve in believers a constant and ordinarily prevailing will to do good, notwithstanding the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary. But the will in unbelievers is completely under the power of sin—their will of sinning is never taken away. Education, religion, and convictions of conscience may restrain unbelievers, but they have *no* spiritual inclinations of will to do that which is pleasing unto God.

That the very nature of man is corrupt, and defiles everything which issues from him, is apparent not only by his sinning from earliest youth, but second, from the fact that all men sin *constantly*: not only are their first acts such, but all their subsequent actions are such. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5)—nor has man improved the slightest since then. It is not that everything done by the natural man is *in its own nature* sinful, but that as they are of a sinner they cannot be anything else than sinful. The thing itself may be the performance of duty, yet if there be no respect unto the commandment of God therein, then it is sinful. To provide food and raiment is a duty, yet because this duty is done from no spiritual motives (out of subjection to God’s authority or the desire to please Him) or end (that God may be glorified thereby) it is sinful. “The plowing of the wicked is sin” (Prov. 21:4): yet plowing is a duty in itself, nevertheless, it is sinful as the action of a sinner.

Third, it is not thus with a few, but with *every* member of Adam’s fallen race: which again demonstrates that it is from the very nature of man all evil proceeds. “All flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:12). “There is none righteous, no, not one . . . they are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is *none* that doeth good” (Rom. 3:10, 12). Finally, all members of the human race sin thus of their own accord. “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15). A child does not have to be taught to sin, he has only to be left to himself and he will soon bring his mother to shame. Things which are not natural have to be taught us and diligently practiced before we learn them. Throw a child into the water, and it is helpless; throw an animal therein, and it will at once begin to swim—its nature teaches him to do so. “Train up a child in the way he should go” and much diligence and patience is required in those who would thus train him; but no instructors are needed to inform the child of the way in which he should not go—his depraved nature urges him into forbidden paths, yea, makes him delight therein.—A.W.P.

### THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

It is scarcely surprising that far less has been written upon the justice of God than upon some of the other Divine perfections. We are accustomed to turn our thoughts unto those objects and subjects which afford us the most pleasure, and to avoid those which render us uneasy. But no servant of the Lord should be guilty of pandering to this tendency. Rather must he endeavour with all his might to declare “all the counsel of God” and to portray the Divine character just as it is set forth in Holy Writ. He must not conceal a single feature thereof, no matter how awe-inspiring it is or how repellent to the fallen creature. It is impossible for us to entertain right conceptions of God unless we have before us a full-orbed sight of His varied excellencies. To view Him only as “Love”; to refuse to contemplate Him as “Light”—will necessarily result in our manufacturing a false God in our imaginations, a caricature of the true and living God.

God is a Being possessed of *every* excellence. Not one of them could be lacking without changing His character, and therefore if any one of them is either unintentionally or deliberately omitted, then the object of contemplation is not the true God, but a figment which is the outcome of our misconception. Yet while we are required to acknowledge all the Divine attributes, nevertheless they do not all produce the same effect in our heart and mind. Some are objects of pleasure, but others fill us with awe and fear. Divine wisdom delights us with the wonders of its production and the marvels of its contrivance. Divine goodness charms us with the richness and variety of its gifts. As we contemplate God as a gracious Benefactor, joy is awakened within us, and as we perceive Him ministering to our numerous needs we are filled with gratitude. But when we turn our thoughts unto the immaculate holiness of the Divine nature and the inflexible justice of His moral government, a different order of sentiments is evoked.

When the human mind is focussed upon the ineffable purity of God and His unchanging righteousness it appears to fallen creatures that He no longer smiles, but frowns upon his works. That easy, peaceable disposition—so pleasing to our hearts, so soothing when we feel the stirrings of conscience—in which we contemplate God while considering His goodness *alone*, gives place to far sterner aspects, and we are made to tremble when He is also seen as an offended Ruler and Judge. Guilty sinners have no desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with One who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab. 1:13), and whose wrath is “revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18). Such a view is terrifying, and they would readily flee to the most distant place if they could escape His awful presence. In the sight of holy angels justice gives a firmness and consistency to the Divine character, but the criminal dreads justice and the Divine justice most of all, since it is far more formidable and inexorable than man’s.

But however distasteful Divine justice may be to the fallen creature, the interests of Truth and not the pleasing of his hearers must be the principal aim of the preacher. If he is regulated by the Scriptures and not by maudlin sentiment, he will be preserved from one-sided and misrepresenting conceptions of Deity, and he will not hesitate to declare that God is just, as well as wise, and good—that He is not only the Creator and Preserver of the world but also its Governor. And that as power and wisdom are requisite to the guidance and maintenance of inanimate nature, so justice is equally indispensable for the government of intelligent and moral agents who are the proper subjects of law and will therefore require to be rewarded or punished. As another has rightly pointed out, “To

deny God's justice is to wrest the sceptre from His hand and to expose His government to contempt and insult by proclaiming impunity to its subjects."

Above we have stated that the Divine justice is far more formidable than man's and that because of this it is so much dreaded by the guilty. The justice of God is the justice of One who is both omniscient and omnipotent, so that it is impossible we should conceal from Him our offenses or escape from the execution of His sentence. God is possessed of both infinitely complete knowledge of every detail of our lives and of the most absolute power to enforce His verdicts. Frightful as it is for a guilty creature to contemplate *such* justice, yet woe be unto the preacher who from the fear of man or from coveting his praise, deliberately softens down the Divine justice so as to cause less alarm. Woe be to the preacher who attempts to show God's justice is not so formidable as some harsh and gloomy minds have declared, or that it will not mark our sins with extreme strictness, or not rigidly insist upon its demands, or that when it is displeased it may easily be pacified.

Never was there a greater need for the ministers of the Gospel to proclaim the inflexible justice of God than in the evil days in which our lot has fallen. Not only is God Himself insulted and grossly dishonoured by the perversions of His character which have been so widely promulgated during the last few decades, but multitudes of people have been fatally deceived thereby, until a generation has now arisen to whom the Deity of Holy Writ is the "unknown God." All around us are those who have so erroneous an idea of the Divine clemency that they suppose God is as easy-going as the modern parent and as lax as many of our judges. They suppose that only in the most extreme and exceptional cases (if indeed then) will He punish the crimes of any with everlasting fire. By such ungrounded assumptions do they stifle any occasional convictions of conscience and steal their hearts against any apprehensions of danger which may visit them, persuading themselves that God is so full of mercy His justice is virtually inoperative.

But if the consideration of God's justice fills the unbeliever with dislike and dismay, it is far otherwise with those in Christ. In very early times Abraham consoled himself with the fact that "The judge of all the earth" would assuredly "do right" (Gen. 18:25). In his wondrous song Moses declared, "I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut. 32:3, 4). David extolled his God as, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works" (Psa. 145:17). Most remarkable is that word in Jeremiah where the Lord is designated "the Habitation of justice" (50:7) so that His people might take hope from and shelter in His righteousness. So, too, His Prophets found comfort therein in the dark days of Israel's declension: "the just LORD is in the midst thereof, He will do no iniquity" (Zeph. 3:5). While from Revelation 15:3 we learn that the denizens of Heaven exclaim, "great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."

"Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face" (Psa. 89:14). This is perhaps the most helpful passage of all in the casting of light upon the most-important, awe-inspiring, and yet glorious subject we are now seeking to study. The great Jehovah is here exhibited to our view under the idea of Sovereign and judge, being presented to our adoring regard as upon His *throne*. It is the Throne of universal empire and of absolute dominion. From that throne the Lord exercises His authority and executes His laws with omnipotent but impartial hand. Justice and

judgment are magnified as being the “habitation” or “foundation” (as the Hebrew word is also rendered) of Jehovah’s throne. There seems to be an allusion unto the bases or supports of an ancient monarch’s throne, as we are told the throne of Solomon had “*stays* on either side of the sitting place” (2 Chron. 9:18).

Let us first consider, briefly, the *nature* of God’s justice. In seeking to arrive at a true conception thereof we need to be very much on our guard against carnalizing the same, degrading the Divine majesty by drawing analogies from that which appertains to the *human* realm. In human affairs justice is simply the giving to everyone his due: but such a rule cannot possibly be applied to the Most High, for the simple reason that He owes His creatures nothing. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon in this day of fleshly arrogance and spiritual ignorance that there is a vast difference between God’s government over His rational creatures and that of an earthly prince over his subjects, and that consequently our notion of justice with regard to the latter cannot be lawfully applied to the former. It is failure at this very point which has resulted in the most wild and irreverent postulates in connection with the justice of God, whereby He has been brought down to the level of His creatures.

A secular ruler is set up for the good of his subjects, this being the principal end of his constitution. The people are not formed for him, but he for them, therefore the administration of justice is a common and public *right*, whereby he is entrusted with the supreme rule for them. The bare statement of this obvious fact is at once sufficient to show the infinite distance which separates between the King of kings and His administration and any secular ruler and his government. God exists not for the well-being of His creatures, but is independent and self-sufficient: for His pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:11). Consequently He owes them *nothing*, nor can they profit Him anything. Therefore it necessarily follows that He could not be said to *wrong* His creatures had it so pleased Him to ordain an economy in which no provision was made for the infliction of punishment upon offenders according to their demerits: that was something which must be determined solely by His own sovereign pleasure.

*Absolutely* considered, God’s justice is the universal rectitude of His nature, for antecedent to all the acts of His will respecting the government of His creatures the glorious and incomprehensible God was essentially and intrinsically righteous in Himself. Divine justice may also be considered relatively, that is, with regard to its exercise in the superintendence and government of rational creatures. It is with the latter the Scriptures are chiefly concerned, that is, with how God acts under the economy which He has instituted. Yet here and there the Sacred Pages give us a glimpse of what God was in Himself prior to His work of creation and taking upon Himself the office of Ruler and Judge. Those glimpses enable us to gain some idea of what Deity is in Himself, considered apart from all His works and workings. Here, too, yea, here *particularly*, we need to be doubly on our guard lest we be guilty of “limiting the Holy One” by circumscribing His actions beyond that which Holy Writ warrants.

It is one thing to say that God cannot act contrary to His own perfections, it is quite another to affirm that God must needs exercise those perfections. We need to use the greatest possible caution in saying what God *cannot* do. God cannot give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8), for to do so would be to admit a rival. God cannot look with approbation upon evil (Hab. 1:12) for to do so would sully His holiness. God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:6), for then He would be unfaithful. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), for He is

without variableness or shadow of turning. But to declare that His justice *obliges* God to inflict punishment on sinners and that He cannot pardon without an atonement, is to daringly assert that which Scripture nowhere teaches. That He “*will* by no means clear the guilty” (Exo. 34: 7) warrants no man in saying that He “*can* by no means clear the guilty.”

It should be pointed out that a thing may be just in a *twofold* sense: negatively, as that which justice does not disapprove of; and positively, as that which justice does require. And it is a question of vast importance if we are to have right conceptions of the absolute independence of God—to consider whether His will to punish sinners antecedently to His purpose to introduce the economy in which such now obtains—was just in the former sense only or also in the latter. Whose rights had God violated had He willed otherwise than He did? Certainly not the creature’s, for He owed them nothing. Nor His own, had He been pleased to forego them. God rules now according to the constitution which He has made, yet none can show—for Scripture contains not the slightest hint thereon—that this constitution was the necessary effect and was *obliged by* His justice.

God was pleased to place His creatures under law—law which was accompanied and enforced by sanctions, promising the reward of life to the obedient and denouncing the penalty of death upon the disobedient—and as the Administrator of that law He is morally obligated to execute its terms. But to insist that a regime wherein sin must be punished or that He was limited to the appointing of a Substitute unto Death if the guilty were to go free, strikes this writer as little (if any) short of blasphemy. Against this it has often been objected that the words of the Redeemer, “If it be possible let this cup pass from Me,” prove that there was no other way in which His people could be saved except by His drinking that cup. We answer, the reason why it was impossible that the Saviour should be spared that awful cup was not because the hands of Omniscience were fettered, but because the veracity of God must fulfill His own declarations to that very end.

It would be just as unwarrantable and wrong for us to say that the great God could not create this world any other way than He has. Or that His nature obligated Him to make it just as He did, is to insist that no alternative was left Him than to place it under the system of government which He has instituted, wherein virtue is rewarded, sin is punished, His grace illustriously displayed, His holiness and justice magnified by means of the satisfaction rendered to Him by His incarnate Son. God’s wisdom is no more limited than is His power, and to argue that any one of the Divine perfections—be it holiness or justice—placed a *restriction* upon the contrivances of God’s wisdom is presumption of the worst kind. The Divine omniscience is as truly regulated by God’s sovereign will as is His omnipotence. All we are justified in saying is that the economy which God has appointed is the one which He deemed best and most glorifying unto Himself.

Under the economy which God instituted He has determined the manner and the extent in which His perfections shall be exercised and displayed. For example, He has determined the several offices which each Person in the Godhead shall respectively hold, and this He did freely of His own sovereign pleasure. He has determined the number of creatures He shall bring into existence, the length of their earthly life, and what shall be their eternal destiny, and in this, too, He acted without any restraint. He determined to give us a written revelation from Himself, concerning which He alone decided how much or how little of His everlasting counsels should be revealed and in which He has made certain promises that He has pledged Himself to fulfill. Certainly He was under no obli-

gation to make any promises at all, but having made them His veracity and His faithfulness require Him to make them good. Thus, the only limitations which the Almighty has placed upon Himself in His dealings with His creatures are those which His own imperial *will* saw meet to impose.

Now under the constitution or economy which it has pleased God to institute in the superintendence or government of His rational creatures, His justice is known among men by different names according to the different objects which it is immediately conversant. Does the Most High, for instance, enact laws for His creatures? then His moral rectitude appears in these laws as *equity*. They are not cruel, but “holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12), framed for our well-being. How thankful we should be for such a law. Has God condescended to express Himself in promises? then His rectitude therein is seen as *fidelity*, for He is immutably faithful in making good every one of them. Has He denounced punishment upon all disobedience? then in the execution of His threats, God’s rectitude appears in His absolute *veracity*. Does He administer those laws both with respect to reward and punishment, with strict impartiality, so that He is no respecter of persons? then His rectitude appears as glorious *righteousness*.

It will thus be seen that His absolute justice expresses what God is in Himself, the moral rectitude of His nature; whereas His relative justice considers Him as standing in relation to His creatures. The one pertains to Him in His private character, the other in His public. It is in His assumption and discharge of His office of Ruler and Judge the latter is exercised. As the Sovereign of the universe He maintains the rights of His throne and order among His subjects. Because of the moral rectitude of His nature, when He enacts laws they are equitable, when He makes declarations they are true, when He expresses Himself in promises they are faithful, and when He declares threats against disobedience they are righteous and inexorable. As the “Habitation of justice” God is to be revered: as the King of kings He is to be submitted unto. He cannot be injured by us, nor does He suffer by our disobedience, but He will assuredly avenge it and vindicate His name.—A.W.P.

### COVENANT MERCY.

Mercy is that perfection in Jehovah which disposes Him to save miserable sinners: not a blind mercy such as infidels dream of, but consistent with the honour of His law and exercised to the glory of its holy precepts and just sanctions; therefore mercy and truth are so often mentioned together in Scripture. God will not show any mercy to sinners but such as tends to establish His truth. Not one of His words can be broken, nor can one tittle of them ever fail. He will be justified in all His sayings and clear when He is judged. He will be true and just whenever He is merciful: His mercies being all covenant mercies, and all given in and through Christ Jesus. All men are by nature children of wrath, and only they who are chosen and called in Christ Jesus are saved from wrath. These are vessels of mercy. His mercy is to them the love of a tender Parent to His miserable children. He pities them and determines to save them from their sins: in due time He quickens them, gives them eyes to see and hearts to believe in Christ as the Apostle witnesses: "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph. 2:4-5).

But for what reason and upon what account is He merciful to them? His mercy has no motive but His own will. The objects of His mercy are corrupt fallen creatures, deserving His wrath even as others; and therefore He does not deal with them upon the footing of desert. If He showed them mercy for any foreseen works of their own, because He knew they would repent and believe the Gospel, and walk worthy of it, mercy would then be turned into justice, and would lose both its name and nature. Whereas He says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." It is from Mine own freedom and sovereignty that I have mercy on any sinners. The cause is in Myself and not in them. I have compassion on whom I will. It is from Mine own love that I have determined to be gracious to them; and My love has determined to save them, and the way also in which I will save them. I have appointed the end and the means at the same time. Of Mine own motion and good-will I have resolved to give My Son for them and My Spirit to them, that they may repent and believe the Gospel and walk worthy of it. And so I may bring them through My tender mercies to eternal salvation. If this were not the case, how could the description be true that mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting"?

The mercy of God knows no variableness or shadow of turning. It is always the same. His Fatherly heart ever entertained thoughts of mercy towards them, for when He shows them mercy it is said to be "according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus"—not for their merits but for His mercies' sake—not for what they may claim to be, but for His own name's sake. He gives all from mercy, and He would have all the glory returned to the mercy of the Giver. What He gives, that He continues, and according to Covenant engagements. Covenant mercies are *certain* mercies: "I will make an Everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of the Beloved" (Isa. 55:3). They have already been made sure to Him. He is now in full possession of every promised mercy. And He has received them not as a private person, but as the Head of the Body, the Church. He keeps them for the use of His Church members. And as sure as the crown is upon His head, so surely will it be upon every one of their heads; for they are in the same covenant with Him, whose sure mercies reach from eternity to eternity.

Oh what a view is here opened to the eye of faith! Mercy always purposing, and in due time bestowing its free blessings upon sinners—mercy without beginning, and with-

out ending. The Holy Spirit often calls upon us to behold it in this life, for He has not celebrated any of the Divine properties so much as this. It is frequently the noble subject of thanksgiving in the Psalmist's hymns. He has dedicated the 136th entirely to the praise of *mercy*: and going through the works of nature, providence, and grace, He ascribes them, one by one, to that mercy which endures forever. Oh happy, thrice happy objects of it! What was in the heart of the Father of mercies towards you from everlasting will be so to everlasting. His sure mercies are yours. His compassions toward you fail not. Whatever you want for your successful walk, He has promised to give you. Be not discouraged then: He will supply all your wants, not for your sakes, but for His mercies' sake. Are you sensible of your unworthiness? That is well, mercy is for such. It can have no glory but from such as you. Trust it, and be assured you will find that it "endures forever."

If a doubt should arise in your mind—it is true, mercy in God cannot fail, but the exercise of it towards *me* may fail: I may so walk as to deprive myself of all claim and title to it. The Psalmist has given a direct answer to this ill-grounded suspicion. He says, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting unto them that fear Him." "Unto them that *fear* Him": this is their character—they *fear* their God. Once there was no fear of God before their eyes; but now they know Him to be their Father. The Spirit of adoption has given them joy and peace in believing it. Hence a holy, filial fear rules in their hearts, and influences their walk. While it operates thus, and as obedient children, they fear to offend their loving Father, and desire to please Him in all things. What ground have they to suspect that His mercy toward them should fail?

But if they cease to fear Him, then will He cease to be merciful to them? No, blessed be God. He has made ample provision in this case. "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:40). This fear is one of the fruits of the Spirit, which He produces in all the children of God; and they have it from Him as a covenant blessing, which is full security for its continuance. It is one of the graces provided for them in the Saviour by the Father's immutable love. "I will," says He, "give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever" (Jer. 32:39). The Holy Spirit is the Guardian of this never-failing fear. It is His office to put it and then to keep it in their hearts. He has the whole charge of it; and therefore He has promised to abide with them forever, that they may fear the Lord all the days of their lives.—W. Romaine, 1770.

(We need scarcely point out that though God bestows inferior and temporal mercies on all His creatures, yet His best and eternal favours are restricted to His elect).

### **SABBATH DESECRATION.**

“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work” (Exo. 20:8-10). This is God’s unchanging law, and no pressure of circumstances can possibly warrant our defiance of the same. All history testifies to the fact that the Lord God is very jealous of His Sabbath, and that He (sooner or later) manifests His sore displeasure upon those who desecrate it. He has recently done so upon Great Britain. No sooner did our munitions factories start on a seven day a week program than we lost practically the whole of our B.E.F. equipment in Flanders! No sooner did the Welsh coal miners start working on the Lord’s Day, than France capitulated, and we lost our best coal customer! “Be not deceived: God is not mocked.” And now it is announced, “For the first time on a Sunday the Zoo in Regent’s Park is to be open at 1 o’clock to the general public.” Of old God asked, “What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath Day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (Neh. 13:17, 18). If our present wicked Sabbath desecration continues, we shall certainly bring “more wrath” from God upon Great Britain. A.W.P.

