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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). It remains for us now to notice the three things here said about God’s people: these are their guilt, their deliverance, their righteousness. First, our *criminality*. It was because we lay under the curse of the Law that the Holy One of God was made sin for us. Therein we may perceive the awful demerits of our case: such a drastic and costly remedy makes unmistakably evident the desperateness of our condition by nature. We best learn God’s estimate of sin by the wages He pays it: nowhere is its exceeding sinfulness so apparent as at the Cross. Faulty views of the Atonement necessarily result in low estimates of sin. Contrariwise, nothing is so calculated to humble us because of our vileness as faith’s contemplation of Christ being made a curse for us.

Second, our *deliverance*. This was something which lay wholly beyond our own powers. Impossible that we could undo the past, equally impossible that we could offer unto God any satisfaction for our countless transgressions. We could no more change our fallen natures than the Ethiopian can change the colour of his skin. To create a world would be no less impracticable than for a depraved creature to produce the fruits of holiness. So far as we were concerned, our case was utterly hopeless: unless Divine mercy took pity upon us, we must inevitably perish. That mercy took the form not of an arbitrary command nor simply of invincible power, but by ordering that none other than the Son of God should become man, take our place, assume our responsibilities and discharge our debts. It was by the sufferings of Christ we were eternally freed from condemnation.

Third, our *righteousness*. Here is the blessedness and glory of the Gospel of God’s grace: that we who are totally devoid of righteousness, who are positively unrighteous, guilty, yea, whose best performances are “filthy rags” in the sight of Heaven, become the very “righteousness of God in Him.” Note well those words “in Him,” and not in ourselves, for the reference is not to sanctification, but to our *justification*; not to our state, but to our *standing* before the Divine Throne. “Righteousness” is here to be taken in its forensic sense, and not as referring to any moral change; to the ground of our acceptance, and not to any disposition of mind or heart wrought in us by the Spirit. The abstract is used for the purpose of emphasis: it is not merely that we are accepted as righteous, but the very ground on which that rests is stated—we become “righteousness” itself.

It is of vital importance that we should have a clear Scriptural conception of this fundamental truth. The believer becomes righteousness solely by *imputation*, just as Christ was “made sin” solely by imputation. True, there are inseparable consequences in each instance: for just as Christ’s being made sin led to His being dealt with accordingly, so our becoming righteousness judicially entails the sanctifying work of the Spirit in us experimentally. But our text is not treating of the effects in either case, but goes right back to bed-rock causes. In precisely the same way that Christ was made sin for us—namely, by God’s imputing to Him the entire guilt of our iniquities; so we become the righteousness of God in Him—namely, by God’s imputing to us the whole merits of Christ’s Law-magnifying obedience.

The antithesis is exact and minute: as our guilt was charged to Christ, so His righteousness is reckoned to our account. As the transference of our guilt to the Surety entailed His suffering the penalty thereof, so the imputation of Christ's obedience unto us entitles us to its reward. As it was for no criminal acts of His own that Christ was made sin—so it is not by any pious conduct of ours that we become righteousness before the Divine tribunal. As it was not on account of any infection of nature or any personal acts of sin that Christ was treated by Divine justice as an offender, so it is not in view of any holiness wrought in us that we are accepted of God and pronounced just by His Law. It is “by the obedience of One,” and not by the works of each believer, that the many are “made (legally constituted) righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

Let us call attention to a parallel passage: “but He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Thus once more we see how helpfully Scripture explains Scripture, for by carefully weighing the terms of this prophecy we are supplied with a sure interpretation of our text. First, the fact of our Saviour's vicarious suffering is stated, those sufferings being inflicted upon Him for our iniquities. Second, the explanation of this solemn transaction is given: punishment was visited upon the Redeemer because the guilt of His people's sins had been laid upon Him. Third, the blessed outcome of this is declared: His being wounded ensures our healing. The “stripes” were all due to us, and they were due to us because of our transgressions; but because our iniquities were imputed to Christ, the stripes were laid upon Him, and therefore healing comes to be ours.

The grand truth affirmed in our text is *the exchange of places*. It is the twofold exchange of places in respect of sin and righteousness severally, and the counter imputations thereof. This is set forth by an antithesis, which fully drawn out would read: “He hath made Him that knew no sin to be sin for us: that we (who knew no righteousness) might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” But there is one word where the parallel is departed from, though this is hidden in our English translation. God “made (constituted) Christ to be sin for us,” but it is not said in the balancing clause, “that we might be made the righteousness of God”: an entirely different Greek word is used, and would be better rendered, “that we might *become* the righteousness of God in Him.” And why? Because this righteousness is only “upon all them that *believe*” (Rom. 3:22). The price was paid when Christ died; our actual possession thereof is when we are planted into Him by faith.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

15. *Fasting*: Matthew 6:16-18.

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:16-18). These words brought to a close the fourth division of our Lord’s address, a division which covered the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, the subject of which is the performing of good works in such a manner as to secure the approval of God. Fasting is mentioned last of the three branches of practical righteousness because it is not so much a duty for its own sake, as a means to dispose us for other duties.

Fasting is the abstaining from food for a religious purpose. Though there is no express commandment in either the Law or the Gospel binding us thereto, yet it is plain both from precept and practice in the Old and New Testaments alike that there are occasions when fasting is both needful and helpful. Though there is nothing meritorious in it, fasting is both an appropriate sign and a valuable means. It should be the outward sign of an inward mortification. It is the opposite of feasting, which expresses joy and merriment. It is a voluntary denying ourselves of those creature comforts to which we are ordinarily accustomed. Rightly engaged in it should be found a valuable adjunct to prayer, particularly for afflicting our souls when expressing sorrow for sin. As to the frequency and the duration thereof this must largely be determined by our ordinary habits, our constitutions, and our vocations.

So depraved is the human heart and so prone is man to rest in externals that he changes what was originally the means or sign unto the end itself. Thus we find the Pharisee boasting that he “fasted twice in the week” (Luke 18:12). Thus that which was designed as a simple means to further and to testify humiliation, repentance and zeal in prayer, was perverted into a meritorious performance which produced self-complacency. But what was still worse, the Pharisees made a stage play of this holy ordinance and resorted to various hypocritical devices therein in order to further their reputation among men for extraordinary piety and devotion. They advertised what should have been a secret between their souls and God: they employed a counterfeit sadness and ostentatious grief, and thereby reduced to a farce and a mockery what should have been held in great sanctity.

“Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.” This was our Lord’s first word on the subject of fasting, and like His first on prayer it consists in a warning against *hypocrisy* therein. This is very searching and should be seriously taken to heart by all of us. Every species of pride is exceedingly foolish and most obnoxious unto the Lord, but the worst form of all is *spiritual* pride, and especially that which aims at securing the applause of our fellows. Fasting, if it be genuine, arises from a deep sense of our utter unworthiness and is designed to express our self-loathing before God. To make the same into a pedestal from which we proclaim our humility and sanctity is indeed a turning of light into darkness.

“When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast.” It may be inquired, How is such a prohibition as this to be harmonized with Joel 1:13, 14, where God required the Jews to “lament” and “howl” in their fast which could scarcely be without a mournful countenance? In a true fast must not the sorrow of the heart necessarily be testified by some convenient signs of mourning and appropriate gestures of the body? The answer is, that Christ was not here condemning a sorrowful countenance in fasting when a just occasion for the same is offered, for godly Nehemiah looked sad (2:2). Instead, our Lord was here engaged in reprehending the wicked deceits of the Pharisees, who deliberately feigned an appearance of great sorrow when in fact their hearts were devoid of contrition. This is quite clear from His next words.

“When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.” But to this it might also be objected: Did not some of God’s own people in the past disfigure their faces in various ways, and that with Divine approval? For example, are we not informed that Ezra plucked off the hairs of his head and of his beard (9:3), and are we not told that Joshua and his fellows fell to the ground upon their faces and put dust upon their heads (7:6)? But each of those cases were spontaneous expressions of deep sorrow of heart—something quite different from what our Lord was here rebuking. He blames the Pharisees for disfiguring their faces, first, because this was the chief, yea the *only* thing they had respect unto in their fasts, namely, the outward show thereof, which God hated. And second, because the word “disfigure” here signifies the very abolishing of their comeliness. They deliberately took means to look wan and emaciated so that they might the better advertise their fasting.

Instead of keeping to the privacy of their homes on fast days and using the time in those sacred exercises of which fasting is both the means and the sign, the Pharisees went abroad and, like stage-players, paraded all the marks of a state of mind which they did not feel, but which they desired that others should believe they experienced. They assumed a sad countenance. “They employed all the usual tokens of deep afflictions and mental distress. They covered their heads with dust and ashes, veiled their countenances, neglected their dress, and deformed their features by contracting them into the most gloomy and dejected looks. They studiously exhibited all the external appearances of humiliation, while their hearts were lifted up in spiritual pride” (Brewster).

Ere passing on let it be duly noted that it was the practice of the scribes and Pharisees not only to fast but also to be very punctilious in observing the outward rites and signs pertaining to religious fasts; nevertheless, as in the former works of alms-giving and prayer, so in this, the principal thing was lacking: namely, truth and sincerity in the *heart*. Their grief-stricken face proceeded not from broken hearts. They were whole and righteous in their own conceits and needed neither the great Physician nor regeneration of soul. In this we may see a true exemplification of the properties of the natural man in matters of spiritual moment: they are more concerned with external deeds than in having the Truth in their inward parts. They content themselves with their outward performances and have little or no regard to worshipping in the spirit. In like manner, the wicked Ahab went to much trouble in humbling himself outwardly, from fear of punishment (1 Kings 21:27), yet continued in his sins.

How often it was thus with Israel of old: they went through the form of humbling themselves and seeking God's favour, when as David said, "They did flatter Him with their mouth and they lied unto Him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant" (Psa. 78:36, 37). And thus it is generally with natural man. The whole religion of the deluded Papists stands in outward ceremonial acts, partly Jewish and partly heathen, and when they have observed them they look no further. And it is no better with tens of thousands among the Protestants who content themselves with the external acts of going to church, hearing the Word, and "receiving the sacrament" once or twice a year. And when these duties are scrupulously observed they imagine that all is well with them and think God is served sufficiently. Yea, let anyone set before them the real requirements of a thrice holy God and he will at once be sneered at by them as being too strict and precise, puritanical and fanatical.

Since our Lord here condemned the fasting of the Pharisees because they rested in the outward work and did it ostentatiously for the praise of men, then how clear it is that the fasting of the Papists is an abomination in His sight, for theirs abounds with more numerous abuses. First, they reduce the practice of fasting to a ludicrous farce, by allowing fish and eggs to take the place of meats and by placing no restriction at all upon wines and other strong drinks. Second, they bind men in conscience to numerous days of fasting and make the omission thereof a deadly sin, thereby taking away Christian liberty, for neither the Saviour nor any of His Apostles appointed any set fast days. Third, they make fasting a meritorious performance, teaching that a man may thereby render satisfaction unto Divine justice for his sins, whereby they blasphemously derogate from the sufficiency of Christ's obedience and sacrifice. How the godly should grieve at the spread of such wicked superstitions in our midst.

It should now be quite apparent that Christ did not here forbid all fasting as such, but was engaged in correcting the abuses of this ordinance. His words, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites" not only take it for granted that His disciples would fast, but manifestly denote that the godly ought to do so, both in private and in public upon just occasion. Nay, if the Saviour here rebukes the Pharisees for their perversion of this holy means of grace, then much more must He blame those who fast not at all. This is not a thing indifferent, left to our option, but something which God requires from us, and for the absence of which He may often increase His judgments (Isa. 22:12-14).

Enough has already been before us to show that God has given us many inducements to stir up our hearts to engage in this exercise. There is the worthy precedent of many holy men in the past who carefully performed this duty when occasion offered, such as David, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah. In like manner we have the recorded examples in the New Testament of the Saviour Himself (Matt. 4:2), Anna, Cornelius, the Apostles and elders of the churches. Moreover we have among us pressing occasions of fasting, both in public and in private. The present state of God's cause upon earth, the withdrawal of the Spirit's unction and blessing, the drying up of the streams of vital godliness, the lack of fruit from the preaching of the Gospel, the abounding of error on every side, the rising tide of infidelity, iniquity and immorality; above all, the national judgments of God now hanging over our heads, call loudly for humiliation, afflicting of our souls, and repentance.

"But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret" (Matt. 6:17, 18). This state-

ment is not to be taken absolutely and literally, but relatively and figuratively. These words of Christ must be understood in the light of their setting, their scope being quite apparent from the context. In Oriental countries, where the air is hot and dry, it is the common custom to anoint the head and face with oil and ointments, which are there plentiful and cheap: Ruth 3:3; Luke 7:46, etc.—“oil to make the face to shine” (Psa. 104:15). That Christ is not to be here understood literally appears from His scope: He was off-setting the Pharisees’ practice of disfiguring their faces. Second, from the fact that He does not here command contraries: the use of such things in fasting as are more appropriate for feasting, for the anointing of the face is indicative of cheerfulness and joy.

The obvious meaning of Christ in the above words is: when you engage in a private fast, so conduct yourself as it may not appear unto men that you are so engaged. Fasting is unto God, and our one and only concern must be to perform this duty in a manner which is pleasing unto Him. So far from parading this duty before men, we must take every possible precaution to conceal our private devotions from them. If we are to enter our chambers and shut the door when engaging in private prayer, equally necessary is it that we observe the utmost secrecy in connection with our private fasting. Everything which savours of pride and ostentation is to be rigidly eschewed. Whenever we devote a portion of our time to extraordinary private devotions there should be nothing in our deportment or general appearance to indicate this unto others. So far from any show of our religious feelings, we should do all we can to hide them from the notice of others.

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast.” “This exhortation certainly does not mean that, on these occasions men should assume a cheerfulness they do not feel, but that there should be nothing in the dress or in the appearance calculated to attract notice; that there should be no abatement in the ordinary attention to cleanliness of person or propriety of apparel; and that, when having brought the solemn services of the closet to a termination, they go out to society, there should be nothing to tell the world how they have been engaged” (John Brown). The great thing to remember and be concerned about is that it is with God we have to do, and not with men. It is with Him our hearts are to be occupied, it is unto Him we are praying and fasting, it is before Him we are to unburden ourselves. It is His pardon and favour we are soliciting. The opinion and esteem of fellow-mortals fades into utter insignificance before the approval and reward of our heavenly Father.

“When thou fastest anoint thine head and wash thy face.” In these instructions we are also taught that Christ requires us to take due care of our bodies. There are two extremes to be avoided: undue pampering and the careless neglecting of them—the former presenting the more real danger in this effeminate age. Any species of gluttony, and intemperance is sinful, for it dulls the mind, stimulates our lusts, and leads to further evil. Such excesses are forbidden in “make not provision for the flesh unto the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14). On the other hand we are warned against the “neglecting of the body” (Col. 2:23) under the pretence of honouring the soul: anything which produces weakness and disability is to be avoided. That care of the body which God requires is a moderate concern for its needs, a temperate use of food so as to fit it for the discharge of duty.

In the above words of Christ we may also perceive that it is a Christian duty to preserve a cheerful countenance. While on the one hand we must eschew all carnal frivolity and lightness, manifesting a habitual seriousness and sobriety; yet on the other hand we

must see to it that we carefully avoid everything which savours of an affected solemnity and melancholy. If we are bidden to guard against any external displays of grief while engaged in those religious exercises which from their very nature tend to sadden the countenance, then most certainly it is our duty to manifest in our general deportment the natural symptoms of a cheerful and contented mind.

It is our duty to refute the world's lie that Christianity is incapable of making its subjects happy. Few things have done more injury to the calls of the Gospel than the sourness, sadness, and moroseness of a large class of its professors. Where Christ rules in the heart He sheds abroad a peace which passes all understanding and a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. True, we must not pretend a peace and joy we do not possess, yet we should be most diligent in opening our hearts unto the influences of that Truth which we profess to believe. God's commands are not grievous, and in keeping of them there is great reward. Let us seek to make it evident to those around us that Christ's yoke is not a hard one nor His burden heavy. Let us make it appear that the Truth has not made us slaves, but free, and that Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness.

"But unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:18). These words contain a warning against the one-sided idea of dispensationalists that Christ will be the sole Judge and Rewarder—a concept which is plainly refuted by such a passage as Hebrews 12:23. It is just as erroneous to restrict the judicial office to the Son as to exclude the Father and the Spirit (Job 33:4, etc.) from the work of creation. The truth is that, with regard to deliberation, authority and consent, the final judgment shall be determined by the whole Trinity, yet with regard to immediate execution by Christ.

We cannot do better than conclude these remarks by quoting from Calvin. "It were far better that fasting should be entirely disused than that the practice should be diligently observed, and at the same time corrupted with false opinions, into which the world is continually falling, unless it be presented by the greatest fidelity of the pastors. The first caution necessary is 'Rend your heart and not your garments' (Joel 2:13): that is, God sets no value on fasting unless it be accompanied with a correspondent disposition of heart, a real displeasure against sin, sincere self-abhorrence, true humiliation, and unfeigned grief—and fasting is of no use of any other account than as an additional and subordinate assistance to these things."—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

11. *At Zarephath.*

We are now to consider one of the most remarkable incidents recorded in the Old Testament, namely, the restoring to life of the widow's son at Zarephath. It is an incident staggering to unbelief, yet he who has any experimental acquaintance with the Lord finds no difficulty therein. When Paul was making his defense before Agrippa, the Apostle asked him, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible (not simply that a deceased person should be restored to life, but) that *God* should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). Ah, there is where the believer throws all the emphasis: upon the absolute sufficiency of the One with whom he has to do. Bring into the scene the living God, and no matter how drastic and desperate be the situation, all difficulties at once disappear, for nothing is impossible to Him. He who first implanted life, He who now holds our souls in life, (Psa. 66:9), can revivify the dead.

The modern infidel (like the Sadducees of old) may scoff at the Divinely revealed truth of resurrection, but not so the Christian. And why? Because he has experienced in his own soul the quickening power of God: he has been brought from death unto life spiritually. Even though Satan should inject vile doubts into his mind, and for awhile shake his confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, yet he will soon recover his poise: he knows the blessedness of that grand verity, and when grace has again delivered him from the power of darkness, he will joyfully exclaim with the Apostle, "Christ liveth in me." Moreover, when he was born again, a supernatural principle was planted within his heart—the principle of faith—and that principle causes him to receive the Holy Scriptures with full assurance that they are indeed the Word of Him that cannot lie, and therefore does he believe all that the Prophets have spoken.

Here is the reason why that which staggers and stumbles the wise of this world is plain and simple to the Christian. The preservation of Noah and his family in the ark, Israel's passing through the Red Sea dry-shod, the survival of Jonah in the whale's belly, present no difficulty to him at all. He knows that the Word of God is inerrant, for the truth thereof has been verified in his own experience. Having proved for himself that the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation," he has no reason to doubt anything recorded in Holy Writ concerning the prodigies of His might in the material realm. The believer is fully assured that nothing is too hard for the Maker of Heaven and earth. It is not that he is an intellectual simpleton, credulously accepting what is altogether contrary to reason, but that in the Christian, reason is restored to its normal functioning: predicate a God who is almighty, and the supernatural workings of His hand necessarily follows.

The entire subject of miracles is hereby reduced to its simplest factor. A great deal of learned jargon has been written on this theme: the laws of nature, their suspension, God's acting contrary thereto, and as to the precise nature of a miracle. Personally we would define a miracle as something which none but God Himself can perform. In so doing we are not underestimating the powers possessed by Satan, or overlooking such passages as Revelation 16:14 and 19:20. It is sufficient for the writer that Holy Writ affirms the Lord to be "*Him who alone doeth great wonders*" (Psa. 136:4). As for the "great signs and wonders" shown by false Christs and false Prophets, *their* nature and design is to "deceive" (Matt. 24:24), for they are "*lying wonders*" (2 Thess. 2:9), just as their predictions are false ones. Here we rest: God alone does great wonders, and being GOD this is just what faith expects from Him.

Last month we were occupied with the sore affliction which came upon the Zarephath widow in the sudden death of her son, and the immediate effect which it had upon her. Stirred to the depths, she turned to Elijah and accused him of being the occasion of her heavy loss. The Prophet made no harsh reply to the unkind and unjust charge, but instead, quietly said, "Give me thy son." Observe that he did not autocratically lay hands upon the corpse, but courteously requested that the body should be turned over to him. We believe that Elijah's design therein was to still her passion and cause her to "against hope believe in hope" (Rom. 4:18) as long before Abraham had done, when he "believed God who quickeneth the dead," for it was (in part) in response to *her* faith that she "received her dead restored to life again" (Heb. 11:35).

"And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed" (1 Kings 17:19). This was evidently an upper room reserved for the Prophet's personal use, as Elisha had his in another place (2 Kings 4:10). There he now retired for privacy, as Peter to the house-top and Christ into the garden. The Prophet himself must have been quite oppressed and disconcerted by the sad event which had overtaken his hostess. Stern as Elijah might be in the discharge of duty, yet he possessed a tender spirit underneath (as such stern men generally do), full of benignity and sensitive to the misery of others. It is quite evident from the sequel Elijah grieved that one who had been so kind to him should be so heavily afflicted since he had come to her hospitable abode, and it would add to his distress that she should think he was responsible for her loss.

It must not be lost sight of that this dark dispensation occasioned a very real testing of Elijah's faith. Jehovah is the God of the widow and the Rewarder of those who befriend His people, especially of those who show kindness to His servants. Why, then, should such evil now come upon the one who was affording him shelter? Had he not come by the Lord's own appointment as a messenger of mercy to her house? True, he had proved himself to be such: but this was forgotten by her under the stress of the present trial, for he is now regarded as the emissary of wrath, an avenger of her sin, the slayer of her only child. Worst of all, would he not feel that the honour of his Master was also involved? That the name of the Lord would be scandalized? Might the widow not ask, Is this how God repays those who befriend His servants?

Blessed is it to observe how Elijah reacted to this trial. When the widow asked if the death of her son was due to his presence, he indulged in no carnal speculations, making no attempt to solve the deep mystery which now confronted himself as well as her. Instead, he retires to his chamber that he may get alone with God and spread his perplexity before Him. This is ever the course we should follow, for not only is the Lord "a very present help in trouble" but His Word requires that we should seek unto Him *first* (Matt. 6:33). "My soul, wait thou only upon God," applies with double force in times of perplexity and distress. Vain is the help of man; worthless are carnal conjectures. In the hour of His acutest trial the Saviour Himself withdrew from His own disciples and poured out His heart unto the Father in secret. The widow was not allowed to witness the deepest exercises of the Prophet's soul before his Master.

"And he cried unto the LORD" (1 Kings 17:20). As yet Elijah apprehended not the meaning of this mystery, but he well understood what to do in his difficulty. He betook himself unto his God and spread his complaint before Him. He sought relief with great earnestness and importunity, humbly reasoning with Him regarding the death of the

child. But note well his reverent language: he did not ask, Why hast Thou inflicted this dismal dispensation upon us? But instead, “O LORD, my God, hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?” (v. 20). The *why* of it was none of his business. It is not for us to call into question the ways of the Most High nor to curiously inquire into His secret counsels. Sufficient for us to know that the Lord makes no mistakes, that He has a good and sufficient reason for all He does, and therefore should we meekly submit to His sovereign pleasure. Man’s “why doth He” and “why hast Thou”? is designated a “replying *against God*” (Rom. 9:19, 20).

In Elijah’s address unto God we may note, first, how that he fell back upon the special relation which He sustained to him: “O LORD, my God” he cried. This was a pleading of his personal interest in God, for these words are always expressive of Covenant relationship. To be able to say “O LORD, *my God*” is worth more than gold or rubies. Second, he traced the calamity back to its original source: “hast *Thou* also brought evil upon the widow?” (v. 20)—he saw death striking by Divine commission: “shall there be evil in a city and the LORD hath not done it!” (Amos 3:6). What a comfort when we are enabled to realize that no evil can befall God’s children but such as He brings upon them. Third, he pleaded the severity of the affliction: this evil has come upon, not simply the woman nor even the mother, but “the widow” whom Thou dost specially succour. Moreover, she it is “with whom I sojourn”: my kind benefactor.

“And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD” (v. 21). Was this proof of the Prophet’s humility? How remarkable that so great a man should spend so much time and thought on that slender form, and bring himself into immediate contact with that which was ceremonially defiled! Was this act indicative of his own affection for the child, and to show how deeply he was stirred by his death? Was it a token of the fervency of his appeal unto God, as though he would if he could put life into his body from the life and warmth of his own? Does not his doing this three times over so intimate? Was it a sign of what God would do by His power and accomplish by His grace in the bringing of sinners from death unto life; the Holy Spirit overshadowing them and imparting His own life to them! If so, is there not more than a hint here that those whom He employs as instruments in conversion must themselves become as little children, bringing themselves to the level of those to whom they minister, and not standing on a pedestal as though they were superior beings?

“Cried unto the Lord and said, O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again” (v. 21). What a proof is this that Elijah was accustomed to expect wondrous blessings from God in response to his supplications, accounting that nothing was too hard for Him to do, nothing too great for Him to bestow in answer to prayer. Undoubtedly this petition was prompted by the Holy Spirit, yet it was a marvelous effect of the Prophet’s faith to anticipate the restoration of the child to life, for there is no record in Scripture that anyone had been raised from the dead before this time. And remember, Christian reader, that this is recorded for *our* instruction and encouragement: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. At the Throne of Grace we approach unto a great King, so let us large petitions bring. The more faith counts upon the infinite power and sufficiency of the Lord, the more is He honoured.

“And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (v. 22). What a proof was this that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12). What a demonstra-

tion of the potency and efficacy of prayer! Ours is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God: to Him therefore let us have recourse whatever be our distress. Hopeless as our case may be to all human help, yet nothing is too hard for the Lord. He is able to do far more exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. But let us “*ask in faith*, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall obtain anything of the Lord” (James 1:6, 7). “This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us” (1 John 5:14). Surely we have need, all of us, to cry more earnestly, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Unless this be one of the effects produced by pondering the incident now before us, our study of the same has availed us little.

But it is not sufficient for us to cry, “Lord, teach us to pray”: we must also carefully ponder those portions of His Word which chronicle cases of prevailing intercession, that we may learn the secrets of successful prayer. In this instance we may note the following points. First, Elijah’s retiring to his own private chamber, that he might be alone with God. Second, his fervency: he “cried unto the Lord”—no mere lip-service was this. Third, his reliance upon his own personal interest in the Lord, avowing his covenant relationship: “O Lord, my God.” Fourth, his encouraging himself in God’s attributes: here, the Divine sovereignty and supremacy—“hast Thou also brought evil upon the widow.” Fifth, his earnestness and importunity: evidenced by his “stretching himself upon the child” no less than three times. Sixth, his appeal to God’s tender mercy: “the *widow*, with whom I sojourn.” Finally, the definiteness of his petition: “let this child’s soul come into him again.”

“And the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived” (1 Kings 17:22). These words are important for clearly establishing the very definite distinction which there is between the soul and the body, a distinction as real as that which exists between the house and its inhabitant. Scripture tells us that in the day of his creation, the Lord God first formed man’s body out of “the dust of the ground,” and second, that He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” and only then did he become “a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The language employed on this occasion affords clear proof that the soul is distinct from the body, that it does not die with the body, that it exists in a separate state after the death of the body, and that none but God can restore it to its original habitat (compare Luke 8:55). Incidentally we may observe that this request of Elijah’s and the Lord’s response make it quite clear that the child was actually dead.

Relatively speaking, though in a very real sense nevertheless, the age of miracles has ceased, so that we cannot expect to have our dead supernaturally restored to us in this life. Yet the Christian may and ought to look forward with certain assurance that he shall meet again those beloved relatives and friends who departed hence in Christ. Their spirits are not dead, nor even sleeping as some erroneously assert, but have returned to God who gave them (Eccl. 12:7) and are now in a state that is “far better” (Phil. 1:23), which could not be were they deprived of all conscious communion with their Beloved. Their souls are not in “purgatory” as sordid priests have pretended for filthy lucre’s sake, but, being absent from the body, they are “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), and in His presence is “fullness of joy” (Psa. 16:11). As to their bodies they await that great Day when they shall be fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body.

“And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth” (1 Kings 17:23).

What joy must have filled the Prophet's heart as he witnessed the miraculous answer to his intercession! What fervent ejaculations of praise must have issued from his lips unto God for this additional manifestation of His goodness in delivering him from his grief. But it was no time for delay: the sorrow and suspense of the poor widow must now be allayed. Elijah, therefore promptly took the child downstairs and gave him to his mother. Who can imagine her delight as she saw her child restored to life again? How the Prophet's procedure on this occasion reminds us of our Lord's action following upon the miracle of restoring to life the only son of the widow of Nain, for no sooner did he sit up and speak than we are told that the Saviour "delivered him to his mother" (Luke 7:15)!

"And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). Very blessed is this. Instead of giving vent to her natural emotions she appears to have been entirely absorbed with the power of God which rested upon His servant, which now firmly established her conviction of his Divine mission and assurance in the truth which he proclaimed. Full demonstration had been given her that Elijah was indeed a Prophet of the Lord and that his witness was true. It must not be forgotten that in verse 14 he had first presented himself to her as a "man of God" (note her words in v. 18), and therefore it was essential he should establish his claim to that character. And this was done by the restoration of her child to life. Ah, my reader, we avow ourselves to be the children of the living God, but how are we making good our profession? There is only one conclusive way of so doing, and that is by walking in "newness of life," evidencing that we are new creatures in Christ.

In closing let us observe how that which has been before us supplies yet another feature of Elijah's domestic life. In considering how he conducted himself in the widow's home, we noted first his *contentment*, murmuring not at the humble fare which was placed before him. Second, his *gentleness*, in refusing to reply to her unkind words with an angry retort. And now we behold the blessed effect upon his hostess of the miracle wrought in answer to his prayers. Her confession, "by this I know thou art a man of God," was a personal testimony to the reality and power of a holy life. O to live in the energy of the Holy Spirit so that those who come into contact with us may perceive the power of God working in and through us. Thus did the Lord override the widow's grief unto her spiritual good, by establishing her faith in the veracity of His word.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

5. *Its Extent.*

In the second half of last month's article we arrived at the most solemn and dreadful aspect of the subject we are here contemplating, namely, that the outstanding property of the "flesh" or indwelling sin consists of enmity against God Himself, and such enmity that "it is not subject to the Law of God neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). This frightful and implacable enmity is entire and universal, being opposed to all of God. If there were anything of God—His nature, His character, or His works—that indwelling corruption was not enmity against, then the soul might have a retreat within itself where it could shelter and apply itself to that which is of God. But alas, such is the enmity of fallen man that it hates *all* that is of God, everything wherein or whereby we have to do with Him.

Sin is enmity against God, and therefore to all of God. It is enmity against His Law and against His Gospel alike, against every duty unto Him, against any communion with Him. It is not only against His sovereignty, His holiness, His power, yea His grace, that sin rears its horrible head, but it abhors everything which is of or pertains to God. His commandments and His threats, His promises and His warnings are equally disliked. His providences are reviled and His dealings with the world blasphemed. And the nearer anything approaches to God, the greater is man's enmity against it. The more of spirituality and holiness is manifested in anything, the more the flesh rises up against it. That which is most of God meets with most opposition. "Ye have set at naught *all* My counsel and would *none* of my reproof" (Prov. 1:25) is the Divine indictment. It is not merely some parts of God's counsel, but against the whole of it that the wicked heart of man is opposed.

Not only is this fearful enmity opposed to everything of God, but it is universal in all the soul. Had indwelling sin been content with a partial dominion, had it subjugated only a part of the soul, it might have been more easily and successfully opposed. But alas, this enmity against God has invaded and captured the entire territory of man's being: it has not left a single faculty of the soul free from its tyrannical yoke, it has not exempted a single member from its cruel bondage. When the Spirit of God comes with His gracious power to conquer the soul, He finds nothing whatever in the sinner's soul which is in sympathy with His operations, nothing that will "co-operate" with Him—all within us is alike opposed to and strives against His working. There is not the faintest desire for deliverance within the unregenerate: "the *whole* head is sick and the whole heart faint" (Isa. 1:5). Even when grace has made its entrance, yet sin still dwells in all its coasts.

Distasteful and humiliating as this truth may be we must dwell further upon it, and amplify what has just been boldly affirmed. Last month we showed how this fearful enmity is evidenced by the *judgments* or concepts which men form of God. Sin has so perverted the human mind that the most distorted views and horrible ideas are entertained of the Deity. Nor is this all: sin has so inflated the creature that he deems himself competent to comprehend the incomprehensible. Filled with pride he refuses to acknowledge his limitations and dependence, and in his flight after things which are far beyond his reach, indulges in the most impious speculations. When he cannot stretch himself to the infinite dimensions of Truth, he deliberately contracts the Truth to his own little measure. This is what the Apostle meant by fallen man's "vanity of mind."

The natural man's enmity against God appears in his *affections*. As the superlatively excellent One, God has paramount claims upon man's heart. He should be the supreme

object of his delight. But is He? Far, very far from it. The veriest trifles are held in greater esteem than is the Fountain of all true joy. The unregenerate see in Him no beauty as they should desire Him. When they hear of His sublime attributes they dislike them. When they hear His Word quoted it is repugnant to them. When invited to draw near unto His Throne of Grace they have no inclination to do so. They have no desire for fellowship with God, yea, they had rather think and talk about anything rather than the Lord and His government. They secretly hate His people, and will only tolerate their presence so long as they conform to their wishes. The pleasures and baubles of this world entirely fill their hearts. Corrupted nature can never give birth to a single affection which is really spiritual.

The natural man's enmity appears in his *will*. Inevitably so, for God's will directly crosses his. God is infinitely holy, man is thoroughly evil and therefore He commands the things which they hate and forbids the things they like. Hence it is that they despise His authority, refuse His yoke, rebel against His government and go their own way. They have no concern for God's glory and no respect for His will. They will not hearken to His reproofs nor be checked in their defiant course by His most solemn threats. They are as intractable as the wild ass's colt: they are like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. They prate of the freedom of their wills, but the wills are ever active *against* God and never toward Him. They are determined to have their own way no matter what the cost. When Christ is set before them they will not come to Him that they might have life. Sooner will water flow uphill of its own accord than the will of man incline itself unto God.

The enmity of the natural man against God appears in his *conscience*. Because he is anxious to be at peace with himself in the reflections which he makes upon his own life and character, it is obvious that an accusing conscience must be a perpetual source of false representations of God. When guilt rankles in the breast, man will blaspheme the justice of his Judge, and self-love prompts him to stigmatize the punishment of himself as remorseless cruelty. A guilty conscience unwilling to relinquish its iniquities and yet desirous of being delivered from fears of punishment, prompts men to represent Deity as subject to the weakness and follies of humanity. God is to be flattered and bribed with external marks of submission and esteem, or else insulted as the worshipper regards Him as cruel. Conscience fills the mind with prejudices against the nature and character of God, as a human insult fills our heart with prejudice against the one who mortifies our self-respect. Conscience cannot judge lightly of One whom it hates and dreads.

The enmity of the natural man against God evidences itself in his *practice*. This dreadful hatred of God is not a passive thing, but an active principle. Sinners are engaged in actual warfare against their Maker. They have enlisted under the banner of Satan and they deliberately oppose and defy the Lord. They scoff at His Word, disregard His precepts, flout His providences, resist His Spirit, and turn a deaf ear to the exhortations of His servants. Their hearts are fully set in them to do wickedness. "Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:13-18). There is in every sinner a deeply-rooted aversion for God, a seed of malice. While God leaves them alone their malice may not be clearly revealed, but let them feel but a little of His wrath upon them and their hatred is swiftly manifest.

The sinner's enmity against God is unmixed with *any* love at all. The natural man is utterly devoid of the principle of love for God. As Jonathan Edwards solemnly expressed it, "The heart of the sinner is as devoid of love for God as a corpse is of vital heat." As the Lord Jesus expressly declared, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42). And mark it well, that fearful indictment was made by One who could infallibly read the human heart. Moreover that indictment was passed not upon the openly vicious and profane but upon the strictest religionists of His day. O my reader, you may have a mild temper, an amiable disposition, a reputation for kindness and generosity, but if you have never been born again you have no more real love in your heart for God than Judas had for the Saviour. What a frightful character: the unmitigated enemy of God!

The power of man's enmity against God is so great that *nothing finite* can break it. The sinner cannot break it himself. Should an unregenerate person read this article and be horrified at the hideous picture which it presents of himself, and should he earnestly resolve to cease his vile enmity against God, he cannot do so. He can no more change his nature than the Ethiopian can change the colour of his skin. No preacher can persuade him to throw down the weapons of his rebellion and become the friend of God. He may set before you the excellence of the Divine character, he may plead with you to be reconciled to God, but your heart will remain as steeled against Him as ever. Even though God Himself works miracles in the sight of sinners it effects no change in their *hearts*. Pharaoh's enmity was not overcome by the most astonishing displays of Divine power, nor was that of the dwellers of Palestine in Christ's day.

It is with indwelling sin as with a powerful and swiftly-flowing river. So long as its tributaries are open and waters continually supplied unto its streams—though a dam be set up—yet its waters rise and swell until it bears down all and overflows the banks about it. Thus it is with the enmity of the carnal mind against God: while its springs and fountains remain open, it is utterly vain for man to set a dam before it by his convictions and resolutions, promises and penances, vows and self-efforts. They may check it for awhile but it will rise up and rage until sooner or later it bears down all those convictions and resolutions, or makes for itself an underground passage by some secret lust which will give full vent unto it. The springs thereof must be subdued by *regenerating grace*, the streams or actings abated by holiness or the soul will be drowned and destroyed. Even after regeneration, indwelling sin gives the soul no rest, but constantly wages war upon it.

The Christian is, in fact, the only man who is conscious of the awful power and ragings of this principle of enmity. How often is he made aware that when he would do good evil is present with him, opposing every effort he makes Godwards. How often when his soul is doing quite another thing, engaged in a totally different design, sin starts in his heart or imagination which carries it away unto that which is evil. Yea, the soul may be seriously engaged in the mortification of sin, when indwelling corruption will by some means or other lead it away unto a dalliance with the very sin which it is endeavouring to slay. Such surprises as these are so many proofs of the habitual propensity unto evil of that principle of enmity against God from which they proceed. It is the ever-abiding presence, the continual operation of this principle which prevents much communion with God, disturbs holy meditations, and defiles the conscience.

But to return unto our consideration of the enmity of the unregenerate. This enmity in the heart of the sinner is so great that he is God's *mortal* enemy. Now a man may be no friend to another, yea he may cherish ill will against a fellow creature, and yet not be his

mortal enemy. That is to say, his enmity against him is not so great that nothing else will satisfy him but the death of the one he hates. But it is far otherwise with sinners and God: they are His mortal enemies. It is true that it lies not in the power of their hands to kill Him, yet the desire is there in the heart. There is a principle of enmity within fallen man which would rejoice if Deity could be annihilated. "The fool hath said in his heart *there is no God*" (Psa. 14:1). Observe well that the words "there is" are in italics—supplied by the translators, to signify an expression of atheism. But read as the original has it, "The fool has said in his heart *no God*": it is not the denying of His existence, but the affirmation that he desires no intercourse with Him: I desire no God: would that He did not exist.

Here is the frightful climax: the carnal mind is enmity with the very being of God. Sin is destructive of all being. Man is a suicide—he has destroyed himself; he is a homicide—his evil influence destroys his fellows. He is a Deicide—he wishes he could annihilate the very being of God. But sinners do not regard themselves as being so vile: they do not consider themselves to be the implacable and inveterate enemies of God. No, they have far better opinion of themselves than that. Consequently, if they hear or read anything like this article, they are filled with objections. "I do not believe I am such a dreadful creature as to hate God, I do not feel such enmity in my heart. I am not conscious that I harbour any ill will against Him. Who should know better than myself? If I hate a fellow creature I am aware of it; how then could I be totally unconscious if there dwells in my soul such enmity against God as you have depicted?"

To these questions several answers may be returned. First, if the objector would seriously examine his heart and commune with himself, unless he were strangely blinded, he would certainly discover in himself those very elements in which enmity essentially consists. He loves and respects his friends: he is fond of their company, he is anxious to please them and promote their good. Is this his attitude toward God? If he is honest with himself, he knows it is not. He has no respect for His authority, no concern for His glory, no desire for fellowship with Him. He gives God none of his time, despises His Word, breaks His commandments, rejects His Son. He has been opposed to God all his life. These things are the very *essence* of enmity.

Second, the sinner's ignorance and unconsciousness of his enmity against God is due to the false conceptions which he entertains of His nature and character. If only he were better acquainted with the God of Holy Writ he would be more aware of his hatred of Him. But the God he believes in is merely a creation of his own fancy. The true God is ineffably holy, inflexibly just, whose wrath burns against sin and who will by no means clear the guilty. If mankind likes the true God, why is it that they have set up so many *false gods*? If they admire the Truth why have they invented so many false systems of religion? The contrariety between the carnal mind and God is the contrariety there is between sin and holiness. The Divine Law requires man to love God supremely: instead, he loves himself supremely. It requires him to delight in God superlatively: instead, he wholly delights in all that is not of God. It requires him to love his neighbour as himself: instead, his heart is inordinately selfish.

Third, above we have said that the enmity of the natural man against God is a mortal one. This the sinner will not allow. But indubitable proof of our assertion is found in man's treatment of God when, in the Person of His Son, He became incarnate. When God brought Himself as near to man as Infinity could approach, men saw in Him "no beauty" that they should desire Him; rather was He despised and rejected by them. Not only did

they disesteem Him, but they *hated* Him “without a cause.” So bitter and relentless was their hatred that they exclaimed, “This is the Heir: come, let us kill Him.” And what form of death did they select for Him? The most painful and shameful their malignity could devise. And the Son of God is still despised and rejected. Forget not His words, “he that hateth Me, hateth My Father also” and our proof is complete.

Does someone ask, What bearing has this lengthy dissertation on man’s enmity upon the subject in hand? Why take up the total depravity of fallen man when you are supposed to be treating of his spiritual impotency? Ah, my friend, we have not wandered from our theme at all: instead, while dealing with the root and extent of man’s impotency we have followed strictly the order of Scripture. What is the very next word of the Apostle’s after Romans 8:7? Why this: “So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God.” It is just because man is corrupt at the very center of his being, because indwelling sin is a law over him, because his mind (the noblest part of his being) is enmity against God, that he is completely incapable of doing anything to meet with the Divine approbation.

Here is the inevitable inference, the inescapable conclusion. “So *then*—because fallen man’s mind is enmity with God and incapable of subordination to His law—they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God.” (Rom. 8:8). And be it said that to be “in the flesh” is not necessarily to be immoral, for there is the religiousness as well as the irreligiousness of the flesh. So great, so entire, so irremediable is this impotency of fallen man that he is unable to effect any change in his nature, acquire any strength by his own efforts, prepare himself to receive Divine grace, until the Spirit renews him and works in him both to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. He is unable to discern spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14), incapable of believing (John 8:47), powerless to obey (Rom. 8:7). He cannot think a good thought of himself (2 Cor. 3:5), he cannot speak a good word (Matt. 5:44), yea, without Christ he “can do *nothing*” (John 15:5). Thus, the sinner is “without strength,” wholly impotent and unable to turn himself unto God.—A.W.P.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

We come now to consider, third, its *manifestation*. But let us make it unmistakably clear at the outset that it is the manifestation of God's justice under the economy which He has instituted which we shall here treat of. It cannot be insisted upon too strongly that there is a vast difference between the justice of God when it be viewed absolutely and when it be viewed relatively—a difference as real and as great as that which exists between His essential independence and those restrictions which He has voluntarily assumed. The justice of God considered absolutely consists of His own Divine rights to do whatever He pleases; the justice of God considered relatively consists of His course of action in relation to those creatures which He has placed under a moral constitution, wherein He has pledged Himself unto a certain order of procedure.

This distinction is far more than a metaphysical nicety: it is a basic fact. The great God was absolutely free to create or not create, just as He saw fit. There was no compulsion—either from within or without—for Him to bring creatures into existence: He decided to go forth into acts of creation solely for His own glory. In like manner, God was entirely free to create whatever kind of creatures He pleased: it was solely for Him to determine whether they should be rational entities or not. So, too, it was for Him to decide whether or not evil should enter His universe and sin mar the works of His hands. Furthermore, it was entirely at His option whether He should promptly annihilate evil-doers or whether their existence should be prolonged; and if prolonged, whether their iniquities should be pardoned or punished; and if punished in what way and for how long. Alas, how ignorant this generation is of Holy Writ!

Absolutely considered, then, the justice of God is one with His sovereignty: that is to say, whatever God decrees and whatever He does is just, simply and solely because it issues from His own imperial will. But relatively considered the justice of God consists in His administering with strict impartiality the Law which He was pleased to frame, so that He gives to each under it his exact due. Above, we made mention of those “restrictions” which God has voluntarily taken upon Himself: lest this be misunderstood or wrested, we hasten to define our meaning. It has pleased God to form a purpose or plan, the broad outlines of which are revealed in His Word, and He is now acting accordingly. It has pleased God to make certain promises and threats and He has pledged Himself to fulfill the same. We shall, then, now contemplate the Divine justice as it is manifested under that economy which the Lord God has appointed.

First, it is testified to by our conscience. Since it pleased the Creator to constitute man a rational creature and to place him under external law, He also saw fit to afford proof within himself that he is subject to a Government which is righteous and just. Man is not only endowed with a faculty which enables him to distinguish between right and wrong, but with perceptions that intuitively feel that justice is worthy of approbation and injustice of condemnation. This is a part of that “work of the law written within their hearts” (Rom. 2:15) by the Maker of men. It is in consequence of this moral faculty that the wicked “knowing (within themselves) the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32). Hence it is that from earliest times and all through the centuries the most benighted even of the heathen have resorted unto all manner of means and devices in seeking to placate Deity.

It is the province of our *conscience* to weigh actions in the scales of God's Law (or what we apprehend to be His Law) and pass sentence according to their conformity or

lack of conformity with that standard. It has rightly been termed the deputy or vicegerent of God within our souls, for it performs not only the work of a monitor by reminding us of our duty and exciting us to attend unto the same, but also of a subordinate judge summoning us before its tribunal and pronouncing us innocent or guilty. Its sentences proceed on the assumption that God's Law is "holy, just and good," with the demands of which we are bound to comply. And as Romans 2 tells us, this moral faculty obtains as truly in those who receive not the written Law of God as in those who do. Thus we see how the creature bears within him a witness to the attributes of God's justice, for the constitution of his mind is as much His work as is the balancing of the clouds.

The workings of conscience are indeed remarkable, for they often expose the vanity of our most specious pretenses and convict us of sin at the moment when we are employing all our sophistry in seeking to justify our mad conduct. In this manner the rights of God as the Supreme Governor to place man under law and to enforce its sanctions are manifested within him even amid his very attempts to repudiate His demands and escape from His yoke. This advocate for God's claims accompanies us wherever we go and makes its voice heard in solitude and company alike. It upbraids those whom men would never think of reproving, and speaks with such potency as makes kings to tremble upon their thrones. It checks us when we are meditating wicked devices and if unheeded, disturbs our pleasure while we are seeking to enjoy our unlawful spoils.

Second, the dispensations of *Providence* tend to confirm the dictates of conscience and manifest the justice of Him who is Lord over all. Providence supposes the preservation of creatures and the government of them according to their respective natures. Are there, then, any indications of a moral government over men? Both experience and observation inform us that good and evil are disbursed, and the point we now raise is, do these appear to be allotted unto men in any degree according to their conduct considered as morally good or evil? Admittedly this is no question which is easy to answer to the satisfaction of many people, especially when they are in a gloomy mood—nevertheless, the Scriptures record so many examples of the justice of God in punishing sin and in rewarding righteousness that the godly cannot doubt the reality of this principle.

Among the more conspicuous demonstrations of the retributive justice of God we mention the sparing not of the angels that sinned, for God "cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4); the swallowing of the inhabitants of the old world by the flood; the overthrow of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; the destruction of the haughty Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea; and the calamities which befell the rebellious Jews, particularly their transportation to Babylon and their subsequent dispersion by the Romans. Secular history also records many striking and solemn demonstrations of God taking vengeance on those who oppressed His people. Instances of Divine intervention in the lives of nations may still be observed, and will not be overlooked by those who are attentive unto what is passing around them and who piously believe that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without the permission of the Most High.

The like retributive justice of God appears also in the case of *individuals*. When the Israelites caught the Canaanite Adonibezek and cut off his thumbs and his big toes, he acknowledged, "Three score and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me" (Judg. 1:7). Ahab's blood was lapped up by dogs in the very place where the blood of Naboth had

been shed (1 Kings 22:37, 38). Jezebel was more guilty than he: Ahab permitted, but Jezebel contrived. Ahab afterward humbled himself, and therefore received honourable burial; but Jezebel was entombed in the bellies of the dogs. Haman was executed on the very gallows which he had set up for Mordecai (Esth. 7:10). Henry the Third of France was killed in the same chamber where the horrible massacre had been planned, and Charles the Ninth died flowing in his own blood in bed.

So plainly does Providence hint that the Ruler of this world is endowed with justice that we find heathen antiquity uniting in acknowledging its belief in Divine retribution upon all enormities. Examples of this are found in the mariners who manned the ship in which Jonah was passenger, for they were convinced that the awful storm came upon them because of some evil-doer in their midst (Jonah 1:7); as also in the case of the inhabitants of Melita, for when they saw the viper settle upon the hand of Paul they exclaimed, "No doubt this man is a murderer whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live" (Acts 28:4). Indeed it will generally be found that the heathen are far readier to consider the workings of Divine retribution than are those nations which profess to be Christian, and that unbelievers today are more ready to own God's hand in justice than most of those who claim to be believers.

This principle of Divine retribution appears also in the lives of God's own people. Jacob secured Isaac's blessing by a piece of deception, posing as his brother Esau, and after seven years of hard service with Laban the homely Leah was palmed off on him in the stead of her beautiful sister Rachel. When Joseph was inflexible to his brethren's requests they exclaimed, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Gen. 42:21). Asa, who put the Prophet in stocks, afterward became diseased in his own feet. Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen, yea, assisted in his execution, for his murderers laid down their clothes at his feet; and therefore Paul himself was afterward stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19, 20)—this is the more noteworthy because Barnabas, who was his companion—who had given equal offense in preaching the Gospel was *not* stoned.

And so it is still. Without being guilty of the presumption and uncharitableness which our Saviour condemned when speaking of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices and of the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell, yet there are times when we are constrained to acknowledge, "Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Psa. 58:11). When we see, as at times we do, the sins of men called to remembrance by the very nature of their punishment, and when we occasionally behold the sinner smitten with the rod of anger while he is in the act of transgression, we cannot doubt that the Ruler of this world is our righteous judge. But it may be objected that the distribution of rewards and punishments is not regular or uniform, that upon the whole the treatment which men receive from Providence is little connected with their character and conduct, yea, that the wicked rather than the righteous are the more successful.

The prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous have in all ages presented an acute problem, and it was the observation of Job that, "the tabernacle of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure" (12:6). David declared, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree" (Psa. 37:35). Asaph lamented, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as

other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Psa. 73:3-5). After declaring, “Righteous art Thou, O LORD, when I plead with Thee,” Jeremiah asked the Lord, “Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?” (12:1). Habakkuk also inquired, “Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Hab 1:13). In Malachi’s days there were those who murmured, “It is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance . . . They that work wickedness are set up, yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (3:14, 15). What answer may be given to such questions?

First, God’s *Word* does sufficiently declare His displeasure against the wicked and His approbation of the righteous even though His Providence does not. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11) Though the warrant is signed, yet the execution thereof may be suspended for just reasons. Sin is not the less odious to God because He does not immediately inflict its punishment. He delays it to display His infinite patience: bearing ‘with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath.’ Some, like Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus, are spared, that they may become the monuments of His sovereign grace. So, too, God has wise reasons for delaying the rewards of the righteous: that faith may be tested, patience developed, and the sufficiency of His grace to sustain under afflictions demonstrated.

Second, it should be more definitely borne in mind that there are other punishments beside outward afflictions and other rewards beside material prosperity. Alas that we so readily forget this. *Invisible judgments* are the most fearful of all. To be abandoned by God unto blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and terrors of conscience, is far worse than any physical loss or pain! Who can measure what Cain felt when he cried, “my punishment is greater than I can bear”! Who can gauge the depths of remorse felt by Judas ere he went and hanged himself! Contrariwise, the favour of God is expressed unto His own people in the spiritual blessings which He showers upon them. What though the ungodly give them the cold shoulder, if they are conscious of the smile of their heavenly Father! Which is the better, houses and lands, or the comforts of an ungrieved Spirit and a peace which passes all understanding? Assurance of Divine sonship is worth more than silver or gold!

Third, Providence must not be viewed piecemeal, but in its *entirety*; nor by halves, but in its whole frame and connection. We are required to possess our souls in patience on this matter, too, for in His own good time God shall make it unmistakably plain to an assembled universe that He is a righteous Ruler and Judge. In the meanwhile God has good reasons for not yet making a full demonstration of His justice by openly rewarding or punishing men according to their works. This is the day of His patience and not of His wrath—it is the day when we are called upon to walk by faith and not by sight. It is our failure to view Providence as a whole which so often makes us say with Jacob, “all these things are against me,” when in reality, “all things work together for good to them that love God.” But it will only be in the future that this grand fact will be fully evidenced. “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12), and what an immeasurable difference this will make!

Fourth, the solemn triumph of the justice of God will fully appear in the *Day to come*. The righteous and the wicked receive but the beginnings of their reward and punishment in this life. Though the wicked are not altogether without punishment yet these are but the *beginning* of sorrows, if we respect either God's external or eternal retribution. The reason for this is not hard to discover: if God should punish no sin here, then none would believe there is a God—if He should punish *all* sin here, none would be afraid of future judgment. "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31)—that will be the grand Assize for all mankind, where the Great Judge shall appear in His royalty. At present God keeps but petty sessions, but then will be, "The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). Now God's judgment is manifested on a few here and there, but then upon all. Now much of His retribution is disbursed secretly, but then *openly*. Now the punishment is but a temporary one, but then eternal. So, too, with the rewarding of the righteous: here they have but the beginning of their salvation, the fullness thereof being reserved for the world to come, for here, too, we have to walk by faith and not by sight.

Finally, let us point out once more that under the dispensations of Providence the external government of God is so exercised as to provide the world with a sufficient witness of His retributive justice as to give plain warning of what may be expected in the world to come. The occasional instance which we behold of the Divine vengeance upon evildoers are notices that the Ruler of this world is not unmindful of nor indifferent to the actions of His creatures, and they are calculated to excite an expectation that in the future God's justice will be more openly and fully displayed. Divine indifference cannot be fairly inferred from the afflictions of the righteous, since they are compensated for by those spiritual consolations which make them joyful in tribulation and are productive of salutary effects. Here justice is mingled with mercy to the godly in their sufferings, and mercy is mixed with justice to the wicked in their temporal blessings; but at the last Day it will be fully demonstrated that God is a righteous Judge, keeping strictly to that Law which He has framed for the government of this world. Moreover, at that Day even the wicked shall be sufficiently delivered from the delusions of Satan as to perceive the righteousness of their Judge in His dealings with them.—A.W.P.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

The Providence of God in His government of the world is a subject of the deepest interest to the Christian. By proper views of it he will see God in the daily works of His hands. Philosophy, falsely so called, and the depravity of the human heart, make a veil of the physical laws by which God usually conducts His government, which hides God in His own works. But truth and Scripture represent all physical laws as having their effect from the immediate agency of Almighty Power, and view God as working in His Providence as truly as He wrought in His works of creation. Christians themselves, though they recognize the doctrine, are prone to overlook it in practice, and consequently to be deprived, in a great measure, of that advantage which constant and deep impression of this truth is calculated to give. An exhibition, then, of the Scriptural evidence of the Providence of God must be of great importance in the stability and comfort of all true believers.

There is nothing that grieves the Christian more sensibly than the introduction and progress of error in religion. Against this he ought to contend earnestly at every risk. He ought not to be ashamed of any part of the Divine testimony with the knowledge of which God has honoured him, nor to seek the praise of men by concealing or modifying God's Truth. But in doing this he will be greatly supported if he considers that it is the will of God that heresies shall enter and pervert many. When he has nailed his colours to the mast, and sinks with his ship, he can have the satisfaction of knowing that his Commander will ultimately have the victory; and that even the partial damage which the enemy has been enabled to inflict was a part of the purpose of his sovereign Lord and Master. Without this view of Divine Providence I cannot see any consolation for the Christian on considering the ravages of error. Philosophy combines with fanaticism, superstition with idolatry to oppose the Lord's Anointed. The only comfort is that the omnipotent Lord reigns, and even by opposers does His pleasure. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision: He will be honoured even in the wrath of His enemies."

Nothing has a greater effect in leading Christians into error than *success*. Men in general judge a cause by its success; and Christians, though they do not recognize it as evidence, yet are often greatly influenced by it. Opinions spread by infection, rather than by a thorough investigation of the evidence. An accurate acquaintance with the ways of Providence, as manifested in Scripture, is calculated to deliver from this prejudice. In the Bible we see that God has often granted much success to His enemies. By this they are hardened in their rebellion. Mere success is no proof of truth; and the want of it no proof of error.

A proper acquaintance with the doctrine of Providence would also be of importance to guard us from having recourse to artifice and craft in the propagation of truth. The Apostle Paul, with all his zeal for the Gospel, disclaims all worldly wisdom in his attempts to advance his progress. He commended the truth to every man's *conscience* in the sight of God. Let us use the means which God has appointed. But if Christianity were in danger of being banished from the earth, let us not attempt to assist it by fraud, or means that are dishonourable. Let us fight the battles of the Lord with the weapons which He has put into our hands, but let us never support truth with sophistry. Leave the event of success to the General. All the ingenuity of all the wise men of the world could not extend the Gospel one inch beyond the limits assigned by God.

It is often afflicting to the Christian to consider the signs of the times in which he lives. Hitherto the affairs of this world have been under the dominion of the prince of darkness. But in the subject of Providence we have consolation. We know that the very opposition made to the kingdom of Christ is a part of the plan of Divine wisdom; and will be overruled for the glory of God and of our Immanuel. God has given the world into the dominion of Satan, but not in such a sense as to exclude Himself from the government. The wrath of Satan, as well as the wrath of man, will be obliged to praise God: and any devise of it which has not this tendency Jehovah will restrain and not suffer to be manifested.—Alexander Carson, 1854.

The Providence of God both as a whole and in all its parts calls for the constant exercise of *faith*—trusting the Lord that He will order all to His glory and the good of His people—for faith is the eye of the soul by which alone we can discern the spirituality of God's wondrous works. To carnal sense there is much in the history of this world which appears to indicate that no Master-hand is shaping its destiny. How often we hear the wicked exclaim, If there were a God, He surely would not permit this and that. But faith rejects such blasphemies, and while it knows that the ways of the Most High are often “past finding out” to finite intelligence, yet is it fully assured that He holds the helm and is directing the ship of mundane affairs according to His eternal counsels, and therefore will the possessor of a Divinely-wrought faith exclaim, “though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.”

In like manner the Providence of God requires the exercise of *hope*, for, “If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:25). Hope looks beyond the present to the future, beyond the long dark night to the morning without clouds. Assured that the Lord is working out His eternal purpose, the heart is not only kept in peace, but is filled with joy as it anticipates the glory which is yet to come. The language of hope is, “when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold,” looking beyond the painful fires unto their beneficent efforts. Hope declares, “weeping may endure for a night, but the joy cometh in the morning”—through tears the sunrise is envisioned.

It is hardly necessary to add that the Providence of God calls for the outflow of *love*. Faith works by love and hope is kept healthy and vigorous by its exercise. If our heads rest upon the Divine bosom, unbelief will be dispelled and our fears quietened. “We know that all things work together for good to them that *love* God, to them who are the called according to His purpose,” and the more our affections be set upon the Divine Worker the calmer our assurance and the clearer our discernment that our Father is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind.—A.W.P.

