

STUDIES
IN THE
SCRIPTURES

“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39

EDITOR: Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

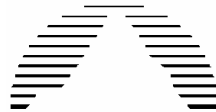
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Studies in the Scriptures appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

At no point does the uniqueness of the Divine Oracles appear more strikingly and conspicuously than in their teachings concerning righteousness. Those teachings are at direct variance with the beliefs and conceits of men the world over: in fact so radical and unpalatable are its pronouncements on this subject that many of those who profess to receive the Scriptures as a Divine revelation have exhausted their ingenuity in attempting to explain away some of its plainest statements. The sweeping assertion that among the sons of men "there is none righteous, no, not one," but that "all the world" stands "guilty before God" (Rom. 3:10,19), is one which never had its origin in any human brain. The declaration that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6) is too distasteful to the proud heart of fallen man to have been invented by "the Church." The question, how can the unrighteous become righteous before the Divine Judge? is one which, when duly weighed, defies solution by human wisdom. If he had no other evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures than their teaching upon righteousness, they would suffice to convince this writer of their Divine Authorship.

"The Word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13). The word righteousness is a forensic one, being the antithesis of guiltiness. Reduced to its simplest form it means righteous, or up to the required standard. It therefore presupposes a rule by which conduct is measured, and that Rule is the will of God as revealed in His Word. The will of God for man is summed up in the Divine Law, and righteousness is nothing more or less than a perfect conformity to the Law in heart and life. Hence we find the Lord saying "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet" (Isa. 28:17), that is, all shall yet be measured by the immutable standard of His Law. Thus we may say, in the first place, that the Word of God is given this particular title because righteousness itself has no other *Rule* to be regulated by. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction in righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Second, the Word is so denominated because righteousness is its prime and inexorable *demand*. The Law is inflexible and implacable. It makes no favourable allowance for human infirmities, constitutional weaknesses, or personal defects. All possibility of misapprehension on this score is excluded if we weigh its solemn declaration, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). "Cursed is every one"—without any exception of persons, without any regard to pleas of human weakness or violent temptations. "That continueth not": it is not sufficient to observe those holy commandments in the general tenor of our lives: our course of conduct must be without the slightest intermission from the earliest dawn of reason to the final breath we draw. In *all* things: we must refrain from every sin forbidden and the least approach to them, and practice every virtue enjoined and every duty enforced. The Law insists upon an obedience which is perfect in its principle, perfect in all its parts, perfect in every degree, and in each of these respects, *perpetual*; and pronounces a curse on the slightest failure.

The spirituality and strictness of such a Law reveals the ineffable purity and immaculate righteousness of its Author. It shows that His nature is so holy and His will so immutable that He will not tolerate the least sin nor spare the slightest transgression. It tells us that those sins in which the light of nature could discern but little turpitude, that those faults which the light of reason is ready to excuse as mere trifles, are unspeakably odious and intolerably loathsome in the eyes of Jehovah. Only when the soul is made acutely aware of this does it cry out with the Psalmist, "my flesh trembleth for fear of Thee and I am afraid of Thy judgments" (119:120). It is because of their sottish insensibility of this that the vast majority of our fellows are sleeping in a false security and dreaming in presumptuous hope, instead of crying to God for mercy and fleeing from the wrath to come. It is because of their willful ignorance and excuseless blindness that the religious crowd knows not that "by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20).

Third, the Word is so denominated because righteousness is its *grand revelation*. Thousands of years ago the questions raised "How then can man be justified with God?" (Job 25:4) and that perplexity had remained unresolved until the end of time had not God Himself supplied the solution. In the Scriptures He has made known a perfect righteousness provided for the unrighteous. It was for that reason the apostle declared, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ—however it may be deemed foolishness by the sophisticated Greeks or prove a stumbling-block to the carnal Jews—for it is the power of God unto

salvation": the grand Instrument which He has ordained for that purpose, and which He will certainly crown with the success He has appointed. And wherein lies the chief and distinguishing glory of the Gospel? "For therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed, from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:16,17): not demanded of impotent sinners, but made ready for their free acceptance—held aloft by a promising God, appropriated by believing souls.

After furnishing conclusive proof that Jew and Gentile alike are destitute of righteousness, the apostle went on to say "But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:21,22). It is a perfect righteousness, which obliterates all guilt and bestows an inalienable title to eternal life. "It is styled the righteousness of God by way of superlative pre-eminence in opposition to any righteousness of our own and in contradistinction from the righteousness of all creatures whatsoever" (James Hervey). But more: it is the "righteousness of God" because God the Father devised it from all eternity, God the Son wrought it out here upon earth, and God the Holy Spirit makes it good to us by working in us a faith which appropriates the same. To sum up Romans 1:16, 17 and 3:21, 22: salvation is by righteousness, righteousness is found in Christ, that righteousness becomes ours by faith.

In Romans 4 the apostle proceeded to illustrate his doctrine by two notable examples. Abraham, who was the most eminent of the patriarchs, the most illustrious pattern of piety among the O.T. saints, the "friend of God" (James 2:23). David, who was the most zealous of the kings, the "sweet Psalmist of Israel," a "man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). How then were *they* justified before God? Not as upright beings who could claim it, but as sinful creatures who must implore it; not by their own obedience, but by faith in the promised Messiah. Abraham "worked not" with a view to obtaining justification, but "believed on Him that justifieth the ungodly" (vv. 1-5). How was David justified? By his zeal for God's glory or by his noble services for his fellow-men? No, by a righteousness imputed, even the righteousness of Christ, that blessed redemption through which "iniquities are forgiven and sins are covered" (vv. 6-8).

Fourth, the Word is so designated because righteousness is its *chief bestowment*. "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17) said Christ. He fulfilled the Law by rendering to it a personal, perfect and perpetual obedience as the Surety of His people, and the moment they savingly believe in Him *His obedience* is reckoned to their account and becomes their legal righteousness before God (Rom. 4:24; 5:19). The perfect righteousness of Christ is "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). It is their "wedding garment" (Matt. 22:12) the "best robe" (Luke 15:22) by which they are covered. And thus may each one say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). Now can he declare "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). A righteous nature is also communicated, which produces righteous conduct: "everyone that doeth righteousness is born of God" (1 John 2:29). Righteousness imputed, righteousness imparted, constitute our salvation. Then let us unite with the Psalmist in exclaiming, "My mouth shall show forth Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day...I will go in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of *Thine only*" (Psa. 71:15,16). —AWP

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

27. Conclusion: Matthew 7:28, 29

Once more we have been permitted and enabled to complete a lengthy though pleasant task, for after writing sixty-four articles on Matthew 5-7 our present business is to pen the closing one. Those three chapters record what is commonly designated our Lord's sermon on the mount. Really, it is far more than a sermon, being what might well be termed the Messiah's manifesto, the magna charta (or "constitution"), of His kingdom, for therein He unfolded the laws and conditions under which alone we can enter His kingdom. In our second article we pointed out that, in keeping with its character and design, this address had twelve divisions—the *governmental* number. They may be expressed thus: 1. The character of those on whom the Divine blessing rests: 5:3-11. 2. The ministerial office: 5:12-16. 3. The spirituality and authority of the Moral Law: 5:17-48. 4. Practical righteousness or good works: 6:1-19. 5. Warning against covetousness: 6:20-34. 6. Unlawful judgment: 7:1-5. 7. Unlawful liberality: 7:6. 8. Seeking grace: 7:7-11. 9. The golden rule: 7:12. 10. The way of salvation: 7:13, 14. 11. False prophets: 7:15-19. 12. Profession tested: 7:20-27.

In the verses which are to be before us we are informed of the effect which our Lord's sermon had upon the large concourse that heard it. This writer often closes his eyes and seeks to visualize the various scenes presented in Holy Writ. On this occasion, the incarnate Son of God, but known only as "Jesus of Nazareth" to the Jews at that time, sat down upon the mountain side—perhaps on some slight eminence, that all might see and hear Him the better. Follow Him then throughout the whole of Matthew 5-7 and attempt to enter into the feelings of His audience. Remember there was no halo of glory about His head, that to their eyes He appeared simply as a Galilean peasant. Yet again and again He sets over against "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time" His imperative and imperial "But *I* say unto you." He denounced the Pharisees as "hypocrites." He declared that in the Day to come, He would say unto the empty professors "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." He closed by insisting that men's eternal destiny would be regulated by how they complied with "these sayings of Mine."

"And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28,29). Here is made known to us the impression which our Lord's discourse produced upon its auditors. They were amazed, and well they might be. The Speaker had not graduated from the Rabbinical schools, nor had He been granted a "preaching license" by the sanhedrim; yet He declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." Then He added "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." He went on to declare that causeless anger was insipient murder and that those who indulged in lustful glances were guilty of adultery. He bade them love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you. He made it evident that it was not merely good advice or salutary counsel He was offering them, but rather was issuing peremptory demands. It was as the King of righteousness He spoke.

The crowd was astonished both at the matter and manner of His preaching, for He spoke with a weight, a majesty, an earnestness which carried conviction. They were filled with a temporary wonderment: yet it is not said that they repented or believed on Him or became His disciples. We too admire the matchless wisdom of His discourse, maintaining as it did throughout a perfect balance of Truth. We are made to marvel at its scope: that He covered so much ground in so brief a space, containing that which was suited to all classes and conditions of men, be they lost or saved, babes or fathers in Christ. We are made to tremble at the fearful solemnity of its utterances: the repeated reference to "Hell" and "Hell fire." We are solemnized as we learn from its final section that in the great Assize the Preacher of this sermon will personally officiate as the Judge of men, pronouncing sentence of doom upon those who conform not to the Divine will. No wonder, that on another occasion, the officers sent by the pharisees to arrest Christ, returned without Him saying "never man spake like this Man" (John 7:46).

"The people were astonished at His doctrine." Have we not good reason to be astonished that they were not much more than "astonished"? Ought they not to have been brought to His feet in worship, perceiving it was more than man who addressed them? Ought they not to have been convicted and converted by His teaching: made deeply sensible of how far, far short they fell of such a standard of holiness, turning

to Him in contrition and crying out for mercy? Alas, what is man, even when he hears the Truth from the lips of Truth incarnate! Capable of being impressed by a Divine message when it falls on his ears from without, but incapable of perceiving his own inward depravity and wretchedness in the light of that message. How true it is that "except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), no, not even when it is brought nigh to him by the King Himself. Then let us not be surprised when only temporary effects are produced under the most faithful and earnest preaching; rather let us be deeply thankful if the Message has found an abiding home in *our* heart.

It may be asked, Why did not Christ put forth His Divine power and turn the hearts of His hearers unto Himself? If three thousand were converted under the Pentecostal sermon of Peter (Acts 2:41), why were not a similar number at least brought from death unto life by this address of the Saviour's? Most certainly He could, had He so pleased, have imparted to the whole of that multitude a saving knowledge of the Truth. Then why was He not pleased to do so? why should the apostles perform "greater works" (John 14:12) than He wrought? Because He had taken upon Him the "form of a *servant*" (Phil. 2:7), and therefore did He aver, "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38). The exercise of His Divine attributes was entirely subordinated unto the will of the Father. Not only did He refuse to work miracles on His own behalf (Matt. 4:3,4), but He only put forth His power for the good of others as He had orders to do so from Above. This lovely perfection of Christ's, which is the glory of His mediatorial holiness, has not received anything like the attention which it justly calls for.

The obedience of Christ was the absolute conformity of His entire spirit and soul to the mind and will of the Father, His ready and cheerful performance of every duty and every thing which God commanded Him. As He Himself declared, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me" (John 4:34). Familiar as are these words to the saints, how few have perceived the *fulness* of Christ's obedience or recognised that His *every act* during the thirty-three years He tabernacled among men was distinctly and designedly an act of submission to God. But this will be the more plainly seen if the reader traces through the four Gospels that oft-repeated expression "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by— the prophet," and then ponders the import of those words. The whole of Christ's course had been marked out for Him. Thus it was that "He came and dwelt in Capernaum" (Matt. 12:12-14). It was not the force of circumstances which drove the Lord Jesus to select that place as His ministerial headquarters, nor was it out of personal inclination: that town had been selected by God for Him long before He came to earth, and it was in subjection to the Divine will that He went there. Christ made obedience to the Father the one great business of His life.

His miracles of mercy were wrought in obedience to the Father's revealed will. "When the even was come they brought unto Him many that were possessed with demons: and He cast out the spirits with His word and healed all that were sick *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet" (Matt. 8:16). How striking is the particular aspect of Truth here made known to us! Christ was tender, sympathetic, full of compassion, yet the first and deepest motive which moved Him to heal the sick was that the will of God might be done. In the volume of the Book it was written of Him, and therefore did He say, "I delight to do Thy will, O God" (Ps. 40:7,8). A striking and beautiful illustration of this is found in John 11. Lazarus is taken seriously ill, and his sisters sent the Saviour an urgent message, saying: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick" (v. 3). Then we read, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," yet the very next thing recorded is "when He had heard therefore that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Mysterious delay! But the mystery was solved by His own declaration, "this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God" (v. 4). Not even His affection for those sorely-trying souls would move Him to respond to their appeal until the Father's hour had arrived.

In like manner, Christ's saving of sinners was in order to the rendering of obedience to God. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out; *for* I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:37,38). What a view does this present to us of the redemptive work of Christ! How it magnifies His blessed submission unto the One who had commissioned Him! Here then is the explanation why He put not forth His own Divine power to convert the whole of His hearers by this sermon on the mount: because He had no word from the Father so to do. Admire then and adore the Lord of glory as He so perfectly discharged His office as Servant. What an example of entire submission to God has He left us. Does the reader desire that we press the question a stage further back and ask, Why was it the Father's pleasure that His incarnate Son should so often suspend the exercise of His Divine attributes and refrain from putting forth His own power? Surely if no other answer was available than what has been pointed out above, *it* would be sufficient: to display the per-

fect oneness between the Son and the Father, to evidence that the Former would not act independently of the Other, to manifest His moral perfections and thereby leave His people an example.

But there were other reasons why it was fitting that a veil should be cast over the Divine glory of the incarnate Son. This was the season of His humiliation, when He came not to rule over the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, but to “have not where to lay His head.” He had entered the place of subserviency, of obedience, yea, He had become “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). And in order thereto it was necessary that He should come unto His own and that “His own receive Him not” (John 1:11), yea, that He should be “despised and rejected of men.” He had descended from Heaven to earth in order that He should be “taken and by wicked hands crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23), yet at the same time offer Himself as a sacrifice to God, as a sin-offering on behalf of His people. It was not then the season for Him to convert men en masse, to overthrow Satan’s kingdom and deliver his captives. The Corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die before the fruit thereof is brought forth (John 12:24). In due time God would exalt Him “with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to [the spiritual] Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31), for then would “the rod of His strength” go out of Zion and His people be made willing “in the day of His power” (Ps. 110:2,3).

Again, by cloaking His Divine power yet at the same time acting as “a Minister of the circumcision for the Truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy” (Rom. 15:8,9) an admirable test was made of men. Though He stopped short of renewing their hearts, yet by acting as the final Spokesman of God (Heb. 1:1,2), by speaking to men as they had never been spoken to before, Christ addressed Himself to the responsibility of His hearers. The Light shone in midday splendor, but the darkness comprehended it not. And why? Because men loved darkness rather than light. Thereby their real character was unmistakably revealed: as incorrigibly and inveterately opposed to God, steeled against Him even when speaking to them through His own Son. Nor could they plead lack of clear evidence that Christ was the Messiah Himself, for the miracles He wrought unequivocally established His credentials. Thus in their not being converted by such a Sermon as this, they were left “without excuse.” Christ, then, put not forth His power to regenerate them, first, because He had no commission from the Father so to do; second, because it was not the time for Him to exercise His royal prerogative; third, because by leaving His auditors to the exercise of their own wills, their accountability was put to the proof and their utter depravity demonstrated.

But further: the Father was pleased that His Son should restrain the power of His Godhead even from His public ministry that it might be more clearly evidenced when His term of obedience had expired, that He was vested with all-sufficient unction and invincible might. After His resurrection Christ affirmed “all power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18), and on the day of Pentecost after the public descent of the Holy Spirit Peter announced, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), where “made” has *not* the force of “constituted” but signifies *made manifest*, for it was from Christ the Spirit had been given (v. 33). God would have it made known unto His people that the Mediator, being ascended, was not only “set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” where He is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3), ruling as King in His royal office, but also that He governs His Church by His Word and Spirit (Rev. 3:1). It was for this reason, when promising the apostles that they should do “greater works” than He had wrought, that He added by way of proof “because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12)—there to rule His people and remain until His enemies are made His footstool.

Finally, it appears to us there is yet another and more solemn reason why (so far as the inspired narrative informs us) not one soul was born again through the instrumentality of this Sermon. We cannot shake off the conviction that here in Matthew 5-7 we have, as it were, a miniature tableau, a typical representation and anticipation of the great Assize. Christ seated on the mount was a figure of His taking His place on the throne of judgment. Encircled by His disciples and the “multitudes” before Him gives a picture of the dread Day to come. The contents of this Sermon reveal both the order of procedure which will then be followed and the grounds on which the verdicts will be passed: “His own” vindicated by the benediction (the “Blessed are ye”) pronounced upon them, and all the others weighed and found wanting in the balance of the very laws which He here enunciated. The effect upon the people will be the same. For though the visible appearance of Christ in that Day will be very different, though He will be seen with “His eyes as a flame of fire” and wearing “many crowns” (Rev. 19:12), yet none shall be brought to repentance and faith by such a sight. “Astonished” they may well be as they learn *Who* it is they despised and rejected, over-

whelmed with horror they will be as they hear His “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire,” but saved by such a spectacle and sentence none will be.

“For He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.” Apparently no deeper impression was made on the people than a sense of wonderment, which caused them to draw an invidious distinction between Christ and the scribes, who dwelt mainly on “the traditions of men” and such matters as tithing mint and cummin and the ceremonial washings of pots and pans. That Christ should teach with authority was intimated in prophecy, when it was announced that Jehovah would put His own words in His mouth and that He should speak unto Israel all that had been commanded Him (Deut. 18:18). It is remarkable that even His enemies bore witness, “Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of Truth, neither carest Thou for any man” (Matt. 22:16). “Though Christ were here in a mean and base state, yet He would not suffer His calling to be condemned, but gets grace thereto” (W. Perkins, 1590, to whom we have been indebted in the course of these expositions). Herein Christ has left His servants an example, for the minister of the Gospel is bidden to “exhort and rebuke with all *authority*” (Titus 2:15), which he can do only as he cleaves closely to the Word and exhorts in the name of Christ.

Let our closing reflection be this: the words of “authority” in Matthew 5-7 are addressed as directly *to us* as to those who first heard them! By its precepts and rules our conduct must be directed: by its promises and encouragements our souls are to be sustained, for in these very scales shall *we* be weighed in the Day of testing and adjudication. To us this Sermon comes with even greater authority than to those who heard it preached in Palestine, for in moving His apostle by the Spirit to register the same as a permanent record of His will He speaks to us from Heaven. Hence the force of that exhortation, “See that ye refuse not Him that [not ‘hath spoken’ but] *speaketh*: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:25). Then let us earnestly seek grace to be something more than “astonished” with this Sermon, namely receive it into our hearts and minds and incorporate it into our daily walk. —AWP

THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA

12. Eighth Miracle

The passage which is to be before us (2 Kings 4:38-41) has in it practical instruction as well as spiritual lessons for us, for the Scriptures make known the evils and dangers which are in this world as well as the glory and bliss of the world to come. Elisha was visiting the school of the prophets at Gilgal, instructing them in the things of God. At the close of a meeting he gave orders that a simple meal should be prepared for them, for though he was more concerned about their spiritual welfare he did not overlook their physical. It was a time of "dearth" or famine, so one went out into the field to gather herbs, that they might have a vegetable stew. He found a wild vine with gourds and securing a goodly quantity, he returned and shred them into the pot of pottage, quite unconscious that he was making use of a poisonous plant. Not until after the broth was poured out was the peril discovered, for when they began eating the men cried out "there is death in the pot." How little we realise the many and varied forms in which death menaces us, and how constantly we are indebted to the preserving providence of God.

The effects of the curse which the Lord God pronounced upon the sin of Adam have been by no means confined unto the human family. "Cursed is *the ground* for thy sake" (Gen. 3:17) was part of the fearful sentence, and as Romans 8:22 informs us "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." No matter where one looks, the observant eye can behold the consequences of the Fall. No section of creation has escaped: even the fields and the woods bring forth not only thistles and thorns, but that which is noxious and venomous. Some of the most innocent-looking herbs and berries produce horrible suffering and death if eaten by man or beast. Yet for the most part, in fact with rare exceptions, God has mercifully provided the sentient creature with adequate protection against such evils. The instinct of the animals and the intelligence of men causes each of them to leave alone that which is harmful: either the eye discovers, the nostril detects, or the palate perceives their evil qualities, and thereby they are guarded against them.

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that what we have alluded to above in the material world adumbrates that which obtains in the religious realm. Among that which is offered for intellectual and spiritual food how much is unwholesome and vicious. The fields of Christendom have many "wild gourds" growing in them, the use of which necessarily entails "death in the pot," for fatal doctrine acts upon the soul as poison does upon the body. This is clear from that apostolic declaration, "their word will eat as doth a canker" or "gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17), where the reference is to the evil doctrine of heretical teachers. But just as God has mercifully endowed the animals with instincts and man with sufficient natural intelligence to avoid what is injurious, so He has graciously bestowed upon His people spiritual "senses" which if exercised "discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). Thus they instinctively warn against unsound writings and preachers, so that "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5).

The mercy of the Creator appears not only in the protecting "senses" with which He has endowed His creatures so that they may recognize and avoid most if not all of the things around them which are inimical to their well being, but also in providing them with suitable remedies and effective antidotes. If there be herbs which are injurious and poisonous there are others which are counteracting and healing. If the waters of Marah are bitter and undrinkable, there was a tree at hand which when cut down and cast into the waters renders them sweet (Ex. 15:25). If we read at the beginning of the sacred Volume of a tree the eating of whose fruit involved our race in disaster and death, ere that Volume is closed we are told of another Tree the leaves of which are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). This fact, then, holds good in both the material and the spiritual realms: for every evil God has provided a remedy, for every poison an antidote, for every false doctrine a portion of the Truth which exposes and refutes it. With these introductory observations we may now consider the details of Elisha's eighth miracle.

First, *its location*. "And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land" (2 Kings 4:38). It will be remembered that it was from this place that Elisha had started out with his master on their final journey together ere Elijah was raptured to heaven (2 Kings 2:1), where his sincerity had been put to the proof by the testing "Tarry here, I pray thee." From Gilgal they had passed to Bethel (2:2), and from thence to Jericho, and finally to the Jordan. It is striking to note that our hero wrought a miracle at each of

these places though in the inverse order of the original tour or journey. At the Jordan he had divided its waters so that he passed over dry-shod before the wondering gaze of the young prophets (2:14,15). At Jericho he had healed the evil waters (2:19-22). At Bethel he had cursed the profane children in the name of the Lord and brought about their destruction (2:23-25). And now here at Gilgal Elisha exercises the extraordinary powers with which God had endowed him. Wherever he goes the servant of God should, as opportunity affords, exercise his ministerial gifts.

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land.” Gilgal was to the east of Jericho, close to the Jordan, where there would be more moisture and vegetation than further inland. It was a place made memorable from the early history of Israel. It was there that the Nation had set up twelve stones as a monument to God’s gracious intervention, when he had caused them to pass through the river dry-shod (Josh. 4:18-24). It was there too that they had circumcised those who had been born in the wilderness wanderings, thereby rolling away the reproach of Egypt from off them, evidencing their separation from the heathen, as being God’s peculiar people—type of the “circumcision of the *heart*” (Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:29), which is the distinguishing mark of God’s spiritual children. It was there also that they had first partaken of “the old corn of the land” (5:11) so that miraculous supplies of manna ceased. Yet even such a favored spot as this was affected by the dearth, for great wickedness had also been perpetrated there (1 Sam.15:21-23 and cf. Hosea 9:15).

Second, *its occasion*: “there was a dearth in the land.” The Hebrew word for “dearth” (*raab*) signifies a famine, and is so rendered in 1 Kings 18:2. This is one of the “four sore judgments” which the Lord sends when He expresses His displeasure against a people: “the sword and the famine and the noisome beast and the pestilence” (Ezek. 14:21). In this dispensation the “famine” with which a righteous God afflicts a land is one far more solemn and serious than that of dearth of material food, as that threatened in Amos 8:11: “Behold, the days come saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” Such a “famine” is upon Christendom today. It has not yet become quite universal, but almost so. Thousands of places dedicated to Divine worship became social centres, political clubs, ritualistic playhouses, and today they are heaps of rubble. The vast majority of those still standing provide nothing for people desiring soul food, and even in the very few where the Word of God is ostensibly ministered it is no longer so in the power and blessing of the Spirit. It is this which gives such pertinency to our present passage.

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal, and there was a dearth in the land: and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him.” What a blessed and beautiful conjunction of things was this. How instructive for the under-shepherd of Christ and for His sheep in a day like this. Though God was acting in judgment the prophet did not consider that warranted him ceasing his labors until conditions became more favorable. So far from it, he felt it was a time when he should do all in his power to “strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die” (Rev. 3:2), and encourage those who are liable to give way to dejection because of the general apostasy. “Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2) is the injunction which God has laid upon His ministers. In seasons of “dearth” the servant of Christ needs to be particularly attentive to the spiritual needs of young believers, instructing them in the holiness and righteousness of a sin-hating God when His scourge is upon the nation, and also making known His faithfulness and sufficiency unto “His own” in the darkest hour, reminding them that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

See here what a noble example Elisha has left those called by God to engage in proclaiming His truth. The prophet was not idle: he did not wait for needy souls to come to him, but took the initiative and went to them. Times of national distress and calamity do not exempt any from the discharge of spiritual duties or justify any slackness in employing the appointed means of grace. Nor did these “sons of the prophets” raise the objection that Elisha sought unto them at an inopportune time and make the excuse they must needs busy themselves looking after their temporal interests. No, they gladly availed themselves of their golden opportunity, making the most of it by attentively listening to the instructions of Elisha. Their “sitting before him” betokened respect and attentiveness. It reminds us of Mary who “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word” (Luke 10:39), which Christ designated that “good part,” the “one thing needful” (v. 42). And though many today no longer may *hear* the Word preached, they can still sit and *read* it: be thankful for the printed page if it contains that which strengthens faith and promotes closer walking with God.

Third, *its beneficiaries*. “And he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe [boil or concoct] pottage for the sons of the prophets” (v. 38). The order of action in this verse is significant for it shows how the needs of the soul take precedence over those of the body. Elisha saw to it that they had spiritual food set before them ere arranging for material. On the other hand, the prophet did not conduct himself as a fanatic and disdain their temporal needs. Here, as everywhere in Scripture, the balance is rightly preserved. Attention to and enjoyment of fellowship with God must never be allowed to crowd out the discharge of those duties pertaining to the common round of life. As Christ thought of and ministered to the bodily needs of the hungry multitudes after He had broken unto them the Bread of Life, so His servant here was concerned about the physical well being of these students: a plain and simple meal in either case in the one bread and fish, in the other vegetable stew.

“And one went out into the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not” (v. 39). Apparently this person took it upon himself to go out and gather herbs in the field: no doubt his intention was good, but so far as the narrative is concerned it records no commission from Elisha to act thus—a clear case where the best intentions do not warrant us to act unless we have a definite word from God, and to use only those means He has appointed. It is possible this person may have returned thanks unto God when his eye fell upon those gourds and felt that his steps had been directed by Him to the place where they were growing: if so, a warning how easily we may misunderstand the Divine providences when we are acting in self-will and interpret them in a way which justifies and apparently sanctifies the course we have taken. When Jonah fled from the command the Lord had given him, to “flee unto Tarshish” and went down to Joppa, he “found a ship going” to that very place (1:3)!

Seasons of “dearth” are peculiarly dangerous ones. Why so? Because in times of famine, food is scarce, and because there is less to select from we are very apt to be less particular and act on the principle of “Beggars cannot be choosers.” Certainly there is a warning here to be careful about what we eat at such times, and especially of that which grows wild. The Hebrew word here rendered “wild” means uncultivated, and is generally connected with “wild beasts,” which were not only ceremonially unclean under the Mosaic law but unfit for human consumption. It is to be duly noted that there was a plentiful supply of these “wild gourds” even though there was a “dearth in the land.” So it is spiritually: when there is a “famine” of hearing the words of the Lord, Satan sees to it that there is no shortage of spurious food witness the number of unsound tracts and poisonous booklets which are still being freely circulated in this day when there is such a scarcity of paper, to say nothing of the vile literature in which the things of God are openly derided.

Yet though these gourds were “wild” they must have borne a close resemblance to wholesome ones or he who gathered them had not been deceived by them, nor would it be said of those who stood by while he shred them into the pot of pottage that “they knew them not.” This too has a spiritual counterpart, as the Enemy’s “tares” sown among the wheat intimates. Satan is a subtle imitator: not only does he transform himself “into an angel of light” but his “deceitful workers” transform themselves “into the apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13,14) for they come preaching Jesus and His Gospel, but as the Holy Spirit warns us it is “another Jesus” and “another Gospel” than the genuine one (2 Cor. 11:4). Those who looked on while this person was shredding the wild gourds into the pot raised no objection, for they were quite unsuspecting, instead of carefully examining what they were to eat. What point this gives to the apostolic exhortation “*Prove ALL things, hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thess. 5:21), and if we refuse to do so, who is to blame when we devour that which is injurious?

Fourth, *its need*. “So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof” (v. 40). It was not until the eleventh hour that they discovered their peril, for the deadly danger of these “wild gourds” was not exposed until they had begun actually to eat of the same; not only had their appearance deceived them, but they had no offensive or suspicious odor while cooking. The case was particularly subtle, for seemingly it was one of their own number who had gathered the poisonous herbs. Ah, note how the apostle commended the Bereans for carefully bringing *his* teaching to the test of Holy Writ (Acts 17:11): much more do *we* need to do so with the preachings and writings of uninspired men. We need to “consider diligently” what is set before us by each ecclesiastical ruler (Prov. 23:1 and cf. Matt. 24:45), for though they be “dainties” and “sweet words” yet are they usually “deceitful meat” (Prov. 23:2,8). How we need to make Psalm 141:4 our prayer!

It was when the sons of the prophets began to eat the pottage that they discovered its deadly character. Ah, my reader, are you able to discriminate between what is helpful to the soul and what is harmful? Is your spiritual palate able to detect error from Truth, Satan's poison from "the sincere [pure] milk of the Word?" Do you really endeavor so to do, or are you lax in this matter? "Hear my words O ye wise men, and give ear unto me ye that have knowledge, for the ear *trieth* words as the mouth tasteth meat" (Job 34:2,3). But let us not miss the moral link between what is said in verse 40 and that which was before us in verse 38: it was those who had just previously been sitting at the feet of Elisha who now discovered the poisonous nature of these gourds. Is not the lesson plain and recorded for our learning: it is those who are instructed by the true servant of God who have most spiritual discernment, and a better judgment than others not so favored. Then "take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24) and what ye read.

Fifth, *its nature*. "They cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof." What made them aware of their peril we know not. Nor is the child of God always conscious of it when some secret repression or unseen hand prevented him from gratifying his curiosity and turned his feet away from some "synagogue of Satan" where there is "death in the pot" being served in that place. Have not all genuine Christians cause to say with the apostle, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us" (2 Cor. 1:10). From that pot of death, Elisha, under God, delivered them.

Sixth, *its means*. "But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot, and he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat. And there was no harm [margin 'evil thing'] in the pot" (v. 41). The "meal" we regard as the Word of God: either the written or the personal Word one of the great types of Christ is seen in the "meat" (i.e. 'meal') offering of Leviticus 2. It is only by the Word we are safeguarded from evil. See how graciously God provided for "His own": though there was a "dearth in the land" yet these sons of the prophets were not without "meal"! How thankful we should be for the Word of God in our homes in such a day as this. Though someone else fetched the meal, "he [Elisha] cast it into the pot"!

Seventh, *its meaning*. Much of this has been intimated in what has already been pointed out, and consideration of space has obliged us to abbreviate these closing paragraphs. Let it not be overlooked that verse 38 begins with "And": after a reviving be careful where you go for your food! If you are suspicious of the soundness of a religious publication take counsel of a competent "man of God." Let not a time of spiritual "dearth" render you less careful of what you feed upon. In seasons of famine the servant of God should be diligent in seeking to strengthen the hands of *young* believers. Only by making the Word of God our constant guide shall we be delivered from the evils surrounding us. —AWP

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE

9d. Its Opposition

We turn now to look at some of those Scriptures appealed to by Arminians in support of their contention that those who have been born of the Spirit may fall from grace and eternally perish. We say "some of them," for were we to expound every passage cited and free them from the false meaning attached thereto, this section would be extended to an undue and wearisome length. We shall therefore single out those verses which our opponents are fondest of quoting, those which they regard as their chief strongholds, for if *they* be overthrown we need not trouble with their weaker defences. It is hardly necessary to say that there is not one passage in all the Word of God which expressly states the dogma the Arminians contend for, and therefore they are obliged to select those which abound in figurative expressions, or which treat of national and temporal destruction, or those relating to unregenerate professors, thereby deceiving the unwary by the mere sound of words and wresting the Scriptures by straining fragments divorced from their contexts.

John Wesley in his "Serious Thoughts" on the apostasy of saints framed his first proposition thus: "That one who is holy and righteous in the judgment of God Himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly." In support of this he quoted, "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed and in his sin that he hath sinned, in these shall he die" (Ezek. 18:24). That the founder of Wesleyan Methodism understood this to refer to eternal death is evident from the purpose for which he adduced it. As this passage is generally regarded by Arminians as "unanswerable and unassailable" we will consider it at more length.

This construing of "shall he die" as "shall perish eternally" is contrary to the entire scope and design of Ezekiel 18, for this chapter treats not of the perseverance or apostasy of the saints, neither of their salvation nor damnation. Its sole aim is to vindicate the justice of God from a charge that He was then punishing the Jews (temporally) not for their own sins but for the sins of their forebears, and therefore there was manifest unfairness in His dealings with them. This chapter has nothing whatever to do with the spiritual and eternal welfare of men. The whole context concerns only the house of Israel, the land of Israel, and their conduct in it, according to which they held or lost their tenure of it. Thus it has no relevancy whatever to the matter in hand, no pertinency to the case of individual saints and their eternal destiny.

Again, though the man here spoken of is indeed acknowledged by the Lord to be "righteous," yet that righteousness by which he is denominated only regards him as an inhabitant of the land of Palestine and as giving him a claim to the possession and enjoyment of it, but not as justifying him before God and giving him title to everlasting life and felicity. For this "righteousness" is called "his" (v. 24) and not Another's (Isa. 45:24; Jer. 23:6), that which *he* had "done" (v. 24 and cf. vv. 5-9) and not what Christ had done for him (Rom. 5:19); it was a righteousness of works and not of faith (Rom. 4:5, Phil. 3:9). This man was "righteous" legally but not evangelically. Thus, if a thousand such cases were adduced it would not militate one iota against the eternal security of all who have been constituted righteous before God on the ground of Christ's perfect obedience being reckoned to their account and who have been inwardly sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God.

Let the reader carefully peruse the whole of chapter 18. The mission of the prophet Ezekiel was to call Israel to repentance. He pointed to the awful calamities which had come upon the nation as proof of their great guilt. They sought to escape that charge by pleading "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." The prophet answers, that, though in His governmental and providential dealing God often visits the father's sin on sinful children, yet the guilt of sinful fathers is never in His theocracy (according to the covenant of Horeb) visited on righteous children. He went further, and reminded them that temporal prosperity was restored to the Nation as soon as an obedient generation succeeded a rebellious, and that as soon as a rebellious individual truly repented he was forgiven, just as when a righteous man became wicked he was plagued in his body or estate.

"Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him the debt . . . And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors" (Matt. 18:27,34). This is quoted to prove that "persons truly regenerated and justified before God, may through high misdemeanors in sinning, turn

themselves out of the justifying grace and favor of God, quench the spirit of regeneration, and come to have their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers." Arminians are not the only ones who wrest this passage, for Socinians quote verses 24-27 to disprove the atonement of Christ, arguing therefrom that God freely forgives sins out of His "compassion," without any satisfaction being rendered to His broken Law. Both of these erroneous interpretations are the consequence of ignoring the scope and design of this passage: Christ was not there showing either the ground on which God bestows pardon or the doom of apostates.

The scope and intention of Matthew 18:23-35 is easily perceived if the following details be attended to. 1. Christ is replying to Peter's "how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? (v. 21). 2. It is a parable or similitude of "the kingdom of heaven" (v. 23), which has to do with a *mixed* condition of things, the whole sphere of profession, in which the tares grow together with the wheat. 3. From Christ's application in v. 35 we see that He was enforcing Matthew 6:14, 15. On account of the mercy and forgiveness which the Christian has received from God in Christ, he ought to extend forgiveness and kindness to his offending brethren (Eph. 4:32). Failure so to do is threatened with awful vengeance. "IF" I forgive not from my heart those who offend me, then I am only an unregenerate professor. Note how Christ represented this character at the beginning: no quickened soul would boast "I will pay Thee all" (v. 26)!

Luke 11:24-26, appealed to by Arminians, need not detain us, for the last clause of Matthew 12:45 proves it is a parable about the nation of Israel—freedom from the spirit of idolatry since the Babylonian captivity, but possessed by the Devil himself when they rejected Christ and demanded His crucifixion. Nor should John 15:6 occasion any serious difficulty. Without proffering a detailed exposition, it is sufficient to point out that the "Vine" is not a figure of vital relationship (as is "the Body": 1 Cor. 12:11; Col. 1:24), but only of external and visible. This is clear from such passages as Psalm 80:8-14; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1; Revelation 14:18,19. Thus there are both fruitful and fruitless "branches" (as "good" and "bad" fishes Matt. 13:48): the latter being in Christ only by profession—hence the "*as* a branch." Confirmatory of this the Father is here designated "the Husbandman" (v. 1)—a term having a much wider scope than "the Dresser" of His vineyard (Luke 13:9).

"For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (Rom. 11:21). But such a passage as this (vv. 17-24) is nothing to the purpose. The "natural branches" were the unbelieving portion of the Jews (v. 20), and they were "broken off" from the position of witness for God in the earth, the "kingdom" being taken from them and given to others: Matthew 21:43. What analogy is there between these and the supposed case of those united to Christ and later becoming so severed from Him as to perish? None whatever: a much closer parallel would be found in a local church having its candlestick "removed" (Rev. 2:5): set aside as Christ's witness on earth. True, from their case the apostle points a solemn warning (v. 22) but that warning is *heeded* by the truly regenerate, and thus is made a means of their preservation.

"Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" (1 Cor. 8:11). 1. It is not affirmed that the weak brother *had* "perished"! 2. From the standpoint of God's purpose and the sufficiency of His keeping power, the feeblest of His children *will not* perish. 3. But the strong Christian is here warned of and dehorted from a selfish misuse of his "liberty" (v. 9) by pointing out the horrible *tendency* of the same. Though Christ will preserve His lambs, that does not warrant me in casting a stumblingstone before them. No thanks were due the Roman soldier that not a bone of Christ's body was broken when he thrust his spear into the Savior's side, and the professing Christian who sets an evil example before babes in Christ is not guiltless because God preserves them from becoming infidels thereby. My duty is to so walk that its influence on others may be good and not bad.

First Corinthians 9:27 simply informs us of what God required from Paul (and all His servants and people), and what by grace he did in order to escape a possible calamity. 2 Corinthians 6:1 refers not to saving grace but to ministerial as verse 3 shows: as laborers together in Christ's vineyard they are exhorted to employ the gifts bestowed upon them. "Ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4) is to be interpreted in the light of its setting. The Galatians were being troubled by Judaisers who affirmed that faith in Christ was not sufficient for acceptance with God, that they must also be circumcised. The apostle declares that if they should be circumcised with the object of gaining God's favor then Christ would profit them nothing (v. 2), for they would thereby abandon the platform of grace, descending to fleshly ceremonies; in such case they would leave the ground of free justification for a lower and worthless plane.

"Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck; of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander" (1 Tim. 1:19,20). So far from these being regenerated

men who spiritually deteriorated, Hymeneus was a profane and vain babbling, who increased from one degree of impiety “unto more ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2:16,17); while Paul said of Alexander that he did him “much harm” and “greatly withstood his preaching” (2 Tim. 4:14,15). Their “putting away” a good conscience does not necessarily imply they formerly had such, for of the unbelieving Jews who contemptuously refused the Gospel (Acts 13:45,46) it is said—the same Greek word being used—that they “put it from” them. They made shipwreck of the Christian Faith they professed (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19) for they denied a future resurrection (2 Tim. 2:18), which resulted in overthrowing the doctrinal faith of some of their hearers; but as 2 Timothy 2:19 shows this was no apostasy of real saints.

Hebrews 6:4-8. There are two sorts of “enlightened” persons: those who are savingly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and those intellectually instructed by the doctrine of the Gospel. In like manner, there are two kinds of “tasting” of the heavenly gift, the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come: those who under a fleeting impulse merely sample them, and those who from a deep sense of need relish the same. So there are two different classes who become “partakers of the Holy Spirit”: those who only come under His awe-inspiring and sin-convicting influences in a meeting where His power is manifest, and those who receive of His grace and are permanently indwelt by Him. The “repentance” of those viewed here is but that of Cain, Pharaoh and Judas, and those who openly repudiate Christ become hopelessly hardened, given up to a reprobate mind.

The description furnished of the above class at once serves to identify them, for it is so worded as to come far short of the marks of the children of God. They are not spoken of as God’s elect, as those redeemed by Christ, as born of the Spirit. They are not said to be justified, forgiven, accepted in the Beloved, or “made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Nothing is said of their faith, love, or obedience. Yet *these* are the very things which distinguish the saints from all others! Finally, the description of this class in terms which fall below what pertains to the regenerate is employed again in verse 9: “But [not ‘and’], beloved, we are persuaded better things of you [in contrast from them] and things which [actually] accompany salvation.”

Hebrews 10:26-29. The apostle says nothing here positively of any having actually committed this fatal sin, but only supposes such a case, speaking conditionally. This particular “sin” referred to here must be ascertained from the Epistle in which this passage occurs: it is the deliberate repudiation of Christianity after being instructed therein and making a public profession thereof and going back to an effete Judaism—the condition of such would be hopeless. The nearest approach to such sin today would be for one who had been taught the Truth and intelligently professed to the same, renouncing it for, say, Romanism, or Buddhism. To renounce the way of salvation set forth by the Gospel of Christ is to turn the back on the only Mediator between God and men. “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” for those who prefer “calves and goats” (Judaism) or “Mary and the saints” (Romanism) rather than the Lamb of God.

“Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back My soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:38). This also is purely hypothetical, as the “if” intimates: it announces what would follow should such a thing occur. To quote what is merely suppositional rather than positive, shows how weak the Arminian case is. That there is nothing here whatever for them to build upon is clear from the very wording and structure of the sentence: it is *not* “Now the just shall live by faith *and* if any man draw back.” The “but if any man draw back” places him in opposition to the class spoken of in the first clause. This is further evident in what immediately follows: “But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (v. 39). Thus, so far from this passage favoring the total apostasy of real saints, it definitely establishes the doctrine of their final perseverance.

“There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them” (2 Peter 2:1). Any seeming difficulty here is at once removed if attention be carefully paid to two things. First, it is not said they were *redeemed*, but only “bought.” The first man was given “dominion” over all things terrestrial (Gen. 1:28), but by his fall lost the same, and Satan took possession by conquest. Christ does not dispossess him by the mere exercise of Divine power, but as the Son of man He secured by right of purchase all that Adam forfeited. He “buyeth that field” (Matt. 13:44) which is “the world” (v. 39)—i.e. the earth and all in it. Second, it is not said they were bought by Christ, but “the Lord,” and the Greek word is not the customary “kurios” as in verses 9, 11, 20, but “Despotes,” which signifies dominion and authority—translated “masters” in 1 Timothy 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18. It was as a Master He bought the world and all in it, acquiring thereby an unchallengeable title (as God-man) to rule

over it. He therefore has the right to demand the submission of every man, and all who deny Him that right, repudiate him as the Despotes.

2 Peter 2:20-22. There are none of the distinguishing marks of God's children ascribed to the characters mentioned in this passage, nothing whatever about them to show they were ever anything more than formal professors. Attention to the following details will clarify and simplify these verses. 1. The "pollutions of the world" here "escaped" are the gross and outward defilements (in contrast from the inward cleansing of the regenerate), as is clear from the "again *entangled* therein." 2. It was not "through faith in" but "through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior" that this reformation of conduct and amendment of walk was effected. 3. These are not said to have "loved the way of righteousness" (Ps. 119:47,77,159), but merely to have "known" it: there is a twofold knowledge of the Truth: natural and spiritual, theoretical and vital, ineffectual and transforming—it is only the former the apostates had. The heart of stone was never taken from them. 4. They were never "saints" or "sheep" but "dogs" domesticated and "swine" externally washed.

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear; clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth; without fruit, *twice dead*, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 12). It is the words in italics which the Arminian fastens upon, but we have quoted the whole verse that the reader may see that it is couched in the language of imagery. A manifestly figurative expression is taken literally: if "twice dead," it is argued they were twice alive—the second time by the new birth, the life from which they had killed. The Epistle in which this expression occurs supplies the key to it. Its theme is Apostasy: of the Israelites (v. 5), angels (v. 6), and lifeless professors in Christendom (vv. 8-19), from which the saints are "preserved" (v. 1) and "kept" (v. 24). Those of verse 12 were dead in sin by nature, and then by apostasy—by defection from the faith, they once professed. "I *will not* blot out his name" (Rev. 3:5) is a promise to the overcomer, every believer (1 John 5:4). —AWP

REWARDS

We closed our previous article on this subject by quoting Galatians 6:7, 8, pointing out that the joys and sorrows of the future life bear the same relation to what is wrought in this as the harvest does to the sowing, one being the consequence, the fruit or reward of the other. There is a definite relation subsisting between sowing to the spirit and reaping life everlasting, between what is done unto Christ in this life and the crowning in the life to come. This relation is just as real as that between sowing to the flesh and reaping corruption, despising and defying Christ and the torments of Hell, though it is not in all respects the same. The portion allotted the wicked is that of due and personal desert, but that bestowed on the righteous is not so, it being entirely of grace, a matter of largess, for it is impossible to lay God under obligation to us or make Him our Debtor. Eternal life is bestowed upon the believer as the reward of Christ's undertaking, because of what He wrought in his stead and on his behalf. Yet that is not the only angle from which the bestowal of eternal life is viewed in Scripture: it is also represented as the end or outcome of our bearing "fruit unto holiness" in the service of God (Rom. 6:22).

Before amplifying the last sentence let us point out the fundamental difference between the "sowing" of the wicked and that of the righteous. All the works of the wicked are essentially their own, having no higher rise than their corrupt nature: issuing from their evil hearts produced of themselves; and as bitter waters can only proceed from a bitter fountain, so their own works are polluted and sinful. But it is quite otherwise with the good works of the righteous: they proceed not from the depraved principle of the flesh, but from the "spirit" or new nature which was communicated to them at regeneration. They are the product of God's working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, and therefore does He aver "from Me is thy fruit" (Hosea 14:8). Even the water of the purest fountain is no longer pure when it flows through an impure channel, and because the flesh in the Christian defiles those good works he performs, but of which God is the Author and Spring, they could not be accepted and rewarded by Him were they not also cleansed by the blood of Christ and perfumed with His merits. Thus we have no ground for boasting or self-gratulation.

Whenever we think or speak of the grace of God we must bear in mind that it reigns "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21). Grace does not override any of the other attributes of God, but is always exercised in perfect harmony therewith and also in full accord with His governmental ways. Therein we behold the "manifold wisdom of God" by displaying in the same act both His mercy and justice, His bounty and His holiness. Therefore we find the Word expressly affirming "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). It is indeed an act of infinite condescension upon His part that He should even deign to take notice of our trifling performances: it is equally an act of pure grace that He should be pleased to reward the same, for no matter how self-sacrificing or arduous those performances, they were naught but the bare discharge of our bounden duty: nevertheless it is also an act of righteousness when He approves of our services and richly recompenses the same both in this life and the life to come.

It is no more erroneous or inconsistent to affirm that the *future* reward will be bestowed upon the Christian both for Christ's sake (primarily and meritoriously) and because of his own obedience (according to the terms of the new covenant and the governmental principles of God), than it is to say that our *present* peace and joy flow directly from the mediation of Christ, and subordinately yet truly so from our own obedience and fidelity. "Great peace have they which love Thy Law" (Psa. 119:165 and Isa. 58:13,14). Those who deny themselves for Christ's sake and the Gospel's are assured of a rich recompense: "a hundredfold now in this time" as well as "in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30). "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Though our obedience be not meritorious, yet God deems it (as the fruit of His Spirit) virtuous and amiable and meet for His approbation, and as a Being of perfect rectitude and benevolence it becomes Him to cordially own the same. If *future* rewards clashed either with Divine grace or the merits of Christ then *present* ones must do the same, for a difference in place or time can make no difference as to the nature of things themselves.

In a recent article on the Perseverance of the Saints we pointed out that the subject of rewards needs to be given its due place in connection with that doctrine. And this for a twofold reason. First, to arouse the careless and expose the formalist. This is one of the many safeguards by which God has hedged about the precious truth of the everlasting bliss of His people. That bliss is not awaiting triflers and sluggards. If there

be no sowing to the spirit in this life, there will be no reaping of the spirit in the life to come. This requires to be pressed upon all who claim to be Christians—never more so than in this day of vain pretensions, when hollow professors abound on every side. A faith which produces no good works is a worthless one. A branch in the Vine that bears not fruit is doomed to be burned (John 15:6). The man who hides his talent, instead of improving the same, is cast into “outer darkness” (Matt. 25:24-30). If the cross be avoided there will be no crown. “If we suffer [for Christ’s sake] we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2 Tim. 2:12).

Second, this subject of rewards should be set before God’s people as an incentive to perseverance, as an encouragement to fidelity. How often have we heard one and another say, The more I try to do that which is right, the worse things seem to become; the harder I endeavour to please God, the more circumstances appear to combine against me. Ah, that may be for the testing of your faith. But whether it be for that end or no, seek grace to lay hold of that word “And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall *reap*, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). Here is the very application which the apostle made of what he had said in the previous verses upon sowing and reaping, as the opening “And” shows. Here is part of that Bread which God has provided for His children when they are dejected and enervated by the difficulties and discouragements of the way. God has provided a bountiful recompense for our labours and this should stimulate us in the performance of duty.

Not only is the promise of reward set before the saints as an incentive to activity, but also as consolation in sorrow, to enable them to endure the oppositions encountered. “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:10-12). This is the manner in which Christ proffers comfort to His sorely-pressed servants: by assuring them of the grand compensation awaiting them on High. Then let us not pretend to a wisdom superior to His, and withhold from His children this part of their Bread because, forsooth, we imagine that to act thus is to impugn the grace of God. As Matthew Henry rightly says upon Matthew 5:12 “Heaven, at last, will be an abundant recompense for all the difficulties we meet with in our way. This is that which hath borne up the suffering saints in all ages.”

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). Here is a pertinent example of the powerful and beneficial influence which a believing view of the promised recompense exerts upon sorely-pressed Christians. These Hebrews had been cruelly despoiled of their earthly possession, and most remarkable had been their deportment under such a trial. So far from giving way to bitter lamentations and revilings, which is the ordinary thing with worldlings on such occasions, or even enduring their loss fatalistically and stoically, they took it cheerfully and gladly. And why? how was such victory over the flesh made possible? Because their faith and hope were in lively exercise; they viewed the promised reward, their inheritance on High; with their bodily eyes they beheld their temporal affliction, but with the eyes of their souls the eternal glory prepared for them. That recompense is here called an “enduring substance” as elsewhere “weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17), in contrast from everything down here which is but a shadow, a mirage which vanishes away.

This was the motive which inspired Abraham: “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tents [not erecting a castle or palace] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. *For* he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb. 11:9,10). *That* was the grand inducement which made him keep on conducting himself as a stranger and pilgrim in this transient scene. That was what braced him to endure all the hardships of the way: his heart was occupied not with Canaan but with Heaven—he looked beyond the toilsome sowing to the blissful reaping. In like manner this was the motive which actuated Moses; “when he was come to years [he] refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” And why? “for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:24-26). His great renunciation in the present was prompted by faith’s laying hold of the grand remuneration in the future.

But a far greater than Abraham or Moses is presented as our Exemplar in this, as in all things else. Of none less than the Redeemer is it recorded “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, de-

spising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). A variety of motives moved the Saviour to endure the cross—love for His Father (John 14:31), the glory of His Father (John 12:27,28), love for His Church (Eph. 5:25)—but among them was the prospect of future recompense. In the previous verse we are exhorted to lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, and the supreme inducement so to do is, "looking unto Jesus...who for the joy that was set before Him endured." Whether that "joy" consisted in the answer to His prayer in (John 17:5), the exaltation of Him above all creatures (Eph. 1:20-22; Phil. 2:9), or His seeing of the travail of His soul and being satisfied (Isa. 53:11) when He shall present the Church to Himself a glorious Church (Eph. 5:27), or all three, yet the fact remains that *this* was an essential motive or reason which prompted the Lord Jesus to do and suffer—that future "joy" was ever before the eye of the Captain of our salvation as He ran His race and finished His course: the prize was kept steadily in view.

It should be pointed out that promises of reward are not restricted to those engaged in the public service of God but are also made to the rank and file of His people. We call attention to this lest humble saints should allow Satan to deprive them of their legitimate portion on the ground that they are "not worthy" to appropriate the same—personal worthiness or unworthiness does not at all enter into the question, as the greatest of the apostles has made quite evident (1 Cor. 15:9,10). It is true there are distinctive promises made unto and rewards reserved for the ministers of the Gospel (1 Peter 5:1-4), nevertheless, there are not a few made unto the whole family of God: Ephesians 6:8 etc. Note how jealously Paul guarded this very point, for after declaring he had fought a good fight, finished his course and kept the faith, he said, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day," he immediately added, "and not to me only, but unto *all them also* that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Said Paul, "Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14). Here we behold the saint running for the "prize": that is what inspired his self-discipline and strenuous endeavours, that was the inducement or incentive. But the prize will not be accorded him for the merit of his running, but because of the worthiness of Christ: yet without such pressing onward, the prize would not be secured. It is sovereign grace which has appointed this prize for the runner, yet unless the "mark" or goal be actually reached, it is not obtained. The prize or "reward" or "glory" is set before us in the Word for faith to lay hold of and for hope to enjoy in confident (not doubtful) expectation, as a motive to stir us unto the use of those means leading thereunto and to make us more fervent in those duties without the performance of which it cannot be reached.

We will close by briefly considering two objections. There will probably be those ready to charge us with inculcating creature deserts, that what we have written is nothing else than an adoption of the Romish heresy of human merits. Our reply is that we have advanced nothing but what is clearly taught in Holy Writ itself. If due attention be paid to the *connections* in which the term "reward" is found this at once rules out of court the Papish conceit. Take its first occurrence: God said to Abraham "I am thy exceeding great Reward" (Gen. 15:1): what had the patriarch done to *entitle* him to such a Portion? Where the question of desert is raised, justice requires a due ratio between the performance and the remuneration, but there is *no* proportion between the works and sufferings of the Christian and the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" promised him. Mark the use of the term in Matthew 6:8 and then ask, On what ground does God recompense our prayers? Certainly it is not for any worth which is in them. There cannot possibly be any merit in begging at the Throne of Grace!

Again; it is objected that to present rewards as an inducement unto fidelity is to foster a mercenary spirit, to reduce the Christian unto a mere hireling—performing his labours for the sake of gain. This is quite an unwarrantable, conclusion. Sordidness lies not in aiming at a reward in general, but in subordinating piety to self-interests, as they who followed Christ for the loaves and fishes (John 6:26). A mercenary spirit actuates him who performs duty solely for the sake of remuneration, or at least, principally for it. We are to view the reward not as a debt due us, but as that which the grace of God has promised, and which His bounty deems suited unto our obedience. Rewards are presented to us as an incitement to gracious activity, to cheer us under self-denials, to strengthen our hearts when meeting opposition. It is the minister's task not only to urge believers unto the performance of duty, but also to hold before them the promised recompenses. That eyeing of the reward in nowise signifies a lack of love for God is clear from the case of Christ Himself (Heb. 12:2). —AWP

OUR ANNUAL LETTER

“Beware lest thou forget the Lord” (Deut. 6:12). It is sadly apparent that a greatly increasing number of our fellows are doing this very thing: and are not *we* in danger of the same? The very fact that this warning is addressed to God’s people shows they are prone unto this fearful sin. Are we ever mindful of His omniscience, that His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3)? Are we never oblivious that He records our conversations when we speak one to another (Mal. 3:16)? When trouble comes without warning, when suddenly confronted with an emergency, are we promptly occupied with His sufficiency? During the last half of this month or the first week of next the world goes mad over an orgy of feasting and fleshly indulgence: how the Christian needs to “Beware lest he forget the Lord” in such seasons of mirth and merry making.

There are countless thousands of young people who were accustomed to attend the public means of grace on the Sabbath day who are now in the forces and services, and much watchfulness and prayerfulness is called for on their part if they are not to “forget the Lord.” It needs to be borne in mind by them that though their circumstances have changed, there is no change in God: either in His just claims upon us, His abhorrence of sin, or His readiness to hear the cry of the humble. They may be far away from home and loved ones, yet they still have God’s Word by them and His throne of grace is ever accessible to the needy. To you, in an especial way, sounds out this warning: “Beware lest thou forget the Lord.” Your peril, your need of His help and strength is greater now than ever it was before.

But most of our readers are still in civilian life, yet many of them in greatly altered circumstances, amid subnormal and abnormal conditions, undergoing heavy strain, encountering acute anxieties, subject to new forms of temptation. How is it with you? Are you casting all your care upon Him, knowing that He careth for you (1 Peter 5:7)? Suffer not circumstances and conditions to crowd God out of your minds: things must not be allowed to supplant *Him*. Unless this humble messenger is helping you to prove that “the Lord is a very present help in trouble” it is of little service to you. Unless you find in these pages, under God, that which nourishes your soul, strengthens your faith, and is making you a more fruitful branch of the Vine, its articles are of little or no value. Intellectual information is profitless unless the Divine precepts and promise are becoming more practical and precious.

This issue completes one more volume, which means that writer and reader are another twelve months nearer *eternity* than when it was commenced! Solemnising thought: how we need to pray “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa. 90:12). O that we may be enabled to offer this petition sincerely, understandingly and expectantly. Throughout another year we have been favoured with daily manifestations of God’s goodness and faithfulness: granting us light from His Word, a goodly measure of health and strength, encouragements along the way, freely supplying our every need. Despite increased difficulties our printers have been enabled to procure paper and do their work for us. Despite the intensified dangers on the sea, we have heard of no copies or gifts being lost in transit. Despite considerable increase in expenses we close another year with a balance to the good.

We thank those of the friends who have made a real effort to obtain new readers for us: they were urgently needed to take the place of old ones who had dropped out. A decreasing circulation is still our greatest trial: each letter telling of blessing received from this monthly messenger makes us yearn to reach more of the hungry sheep. As it now costs us 5/- to mail this magazine to each person for a year, we trust those sending in this or a smaller amount will not expect a written acknowledgment—your continuing to receive the “Studies” (D.V.) will indicate your donation has come to hand. We are still gladly, sending to a number not in the position to contribute unto costs of publishing, as well as to chaplains and missionaries.

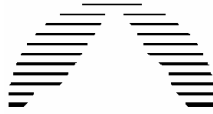
The Sermon on the Mount articles will (D.V.) be followed by a series on the “Prayers of the Apostles”: we know of no book dealing with them, so will be cast back the more upon the Lord. We have nearly completed our exposition of the Final Perseverance of the Saints, and purpose taking up next the little-attended-to doctrine of Reconciliation. We hope to also write at some length on Spiritual Growth, a subject which is by no means free of difficulty—due to our dullness of perception and the weakness of our faith. If the Lord be pleased to conduct us into these green pastures and permits us to drink from these Waters of Life, seasons of refreshing will be the portion of both writer and reader. Pray to this end.

Once more, in the mercy of God, we have promise that the twelve issues of 1943 "Studies" will be available in bound form by the end of the year, for those desiring the same in a more suitable condition for permanent use. The price will be 5/6 (\$1.25) postpaid. Unless they were printed at the same time as the loose copies, we could not sell at anything like this figure. The quantity is limited, so first come first served.

Asking for a continued place in your prayers, and with Christian greetings,

Yours by Divine Mercy,

A. W. and Vera E. Pink



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