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THE RIGHT BEGINNING.

How much depends upon a right beginning. If the foundation be faulty, the superstructure is insecure; if the babe be undernourished the child will be unhealthy; if the child grows up uneducated, the man is handicapped for life. Doubly so does this hold good in spiritual matters. If the preacher ignores the Law and presents only the Gospel, his “converts” will be as worthless as wheat sown upon ground which was neither plowed nor harrowed. If the babe in Christ be erroneously indoctrinated, he is disqualified from fighting the good fight of faith. If the local church fails to maintain a Scriptural discipline, and instead spends its energies in home and foreign “missions,” then disastrous will be the outcome. In like manner, if we enter upon a new year without beginning it properly, then we cannot expect to enjoy spiritual prosperity therein.

“In the beginning GOD” (Gen. 1:1). Thus opens the Sacred Scriptures, and since they are of Divine authorship what other frontispiece could they possibly have! This is the very essence of their inspiration: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation (human origination), for the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Not to human skill nor to human goodness is the Bible to be attributed but rather to the wisdom and superintendence of the Spirit is it to be ascribed. So, too, of the *contents* of the Scriptures: “In the Beginning God”—He is the Alpha as well as the Omega of their subject matter. From Genesis to Revelation *He* has the precedence and the pre-eminence. The precepts, the promises, the predictions of Holy Writ are alike prefaced with a “thus saith the Lord.”

“In the beginning GOD” is *the explanation of salvation*. Alas that this is so faintly recognized and so feebly insisted upon today. True, that in most circles reputed as orthodox it is still allowed that the planning and providing of salvation is of the Lord, but when it comes to the actual reception and enjoyment thereof, proud man determines to place the crown of honour upon his own head, by insisting that that which made him to differ from the unsaved was his willingness to accept Christ. But from whence did such willingness originate? Certainly not from mere nature, for the heart of every unregenerate person is stubbornly steeled against its Maker. God must take away the heart of stone and impart a heart of flesh before there will be any yielding to the gracious influences of His blessed Spirit. The fact is that we love Him because He first loved us. Had He never chosen us to be His sons, we should never have chosen Him to be our God.

“In the beginning GOD” is *the essence of all genuine piety*. The fear of God and the love of God are the springs from which all true yielding of ourselves unto Him proceeds, and where there is not *that*, real spirituality is absent. Hence we read of the Corinthian saints that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5)—for the Lord wants no man’s money till He first possesses his heart. Until we have surrendered ourselves to the authority of God our profession is worthless and our religion is vain. Hence it is that the hortatory section of the first Epistle of the New Testament opens with, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). It is here we must begin, and it is to here we must constantly return.

“In the beginning GOD” was *the keynote of the life of Jesus Christ*, and throughout the whole of His course everything was in perfect keeping therewith. He could say, “I was cast upon Thee

from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly" (Psa. 22:10). Herein we perceive His uniqueness, for none other could make such a claim. From the very first breath that He drew, His whole being was completely yielded to God. Hence it was that as a Boy of twelve we hear Him exclaiming, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). "The LORD is the portion of Mine inheritance" (Psa. 16:5), was His unqualified testimony, and therefore could He affirm, "I have set the LORD always before Me" (Psa. 16:8). Even in the midst of His crucifixion agony He cried, "My God, My God," and into His hands He trustfully committed His spirit, assured that His soul should not be left in Hades nor His body suffered to see corruption.

"In the beginning GOD." Is not this the word we particularly need to take unto ourselves and lay to heart as we enter upon a new year? Should we not begin by solemnly renewing our covenant with God and consecrate ourselves afresh to Him? His claims upon us are paramount: gratitude for His countless mercies calls for nothing less. Review the past, my reader: can you discover any cause for regret whenever God was given the first place in your life? Ah, is it not because other things were allowed to displace Him from the throne of your heart that you now find most occasion for sorrow and shame? Then should we not seek to profit from these disastrous lapses and prevent their recurrence? And how can we do so but by contritely confessing our sinful failures and by begging Him to come in and sup with us afresh.

"In the beginning GOD." Is not this our desire and resolve as we enter upon a new cycle of time? Should not I, and you, my reader, make this our motto for 1940—that we prayerfully determine to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways; to embark upon no undertaking (great or small); to enter into no fresh relationship; to essay no task—without first seeking God's help and blessing? Let, "in the beginning God," characterize each fresh day by our turning to Him from whom all our help comes. In perplexity, in sickness, in sorrow, let us turn *to God first*, and not to human counselors, doctors, or loved ones. Yes, and when we have sinned, let us promptly and penitently seek the face of Him who delights in mercy. And should this be the year when death sends us a solemn summons to depart hence, let us submissively place ourselves in His hands and then we shall "fear no evil" as we pass through the valley of shadows, and in a far grander sense will it *then* be true, "in the beginning (of our new experience) GOD," for "absent from the body, present with the Lord."—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

13. *The Law and Retaliation: Matthew 5:38-42.*

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (v. 39). In order to properly understand and rightly apply this injunction, due regard must be paid to its context, and the whole interpreted in harmony with the general Analogy of Faith, otherwise we are in imminent danger of making Scripture to contradict itself. As we sought to show last month, Christ was not here repealing an important Mosaic statute and substituting in its place a milder and more merciful rule for His followers to observe, but was (as in the preceding sections of His Sermon) refuting an error of the Scribes and reprehending the evil practice of the Pharisees. They had given a promiscuous application to a judicial regulation for the use of magistrates, a regulation which placed strict bounds upon the punishment to be meted out unto those guilty of deeds of maiming.

The statute pertaining to *magistrates only* had been given a general application, so that the people were allowed to take the law into their own hands—each individual being free to privately avenge his wrongs—which not only condoned but *encouraged* the spirit of malice and revenge. It was in view of this wicked perversion of the Divine Law that our Saviour said, “Resist not evil.” More literally it is, “Resist not the evil one,” that is, the evil individual who has injured you. Resist not: think not of taking the law into your own hands, requiting the adversary as he has done to you. Cherish not against him the spirit of revenge, but be actuated by nobler principles and more spiritual considerations. Such is plainly the general purport of this precept: its particular implications must now be considered.

Even Mr. F. W. Grant (a leader among the “Plymouth Brethren”) stated that, “The righteousness of the Law, of course, remains righteousness, but it does not require of any that they exact for personal wrongs. There is no supposition of the abrogation of law or of its penalties. The government of the world is not in question, but the path of disciples in it. Where they are bound by the Law, they are bound, and have no privileges. They, are bound, too, *to sustain it in its general working*, as ordained of God for good. Within these limits there is still abundant room for such practice as is here enjoined. We may still turn the left cheek to him that smites the right, or let the man that sues us have the cloak as well as the coat which he has fraudulently gained: for that is clearly within our rights. If the cause were that of another, we should have no right of this kind, nor to aid men generally in escape from justice or in slighting it. The Lord could never lay down a general rule that His people should allow lawlessness, or identify themselves with indifference to the rights of others” (The Numerical Bible).

“Resist not evil.” That which Christ here forbade was not the resisting of evil by a lawful defense, but by way of *private revenge*. Public reparation is when the magistrate, according to the justice and mercy of the Divine Law, sentences an evil person that has injured his fellow. Private revenge is when those who are not magistrates take matters into their own hands and retaliate against those who have wronged them. The *former* is clearly permitted, for an Apostle declares the magistrate is, “the minister of God,” for executing judgment upon evil-doers. The same Epistle as expressly forbids retaliation: “Recompense to no man evil for evil” (Rom. 12:17).

“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.” There are many who err in supposing that such a precept as this is peculiar to the New Testament. A comparison of the two Testaments will show that identically the same rule of duty is obtained in both economies. “If thine enemy be hungry,

give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head” (Prov. 25:21, 22); “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:20). Rightly did one of the older writers say, when commenting upon this passage in Proverbs 25, “The law of love is not expounded more spiritually in any single precept either by Christ or His Apostles than this exhortation.” It’s obvious meaning is seize the moment of distress to show kindness to him that hates you.

Living in a sinful world, we must expect to meet with injustices and unprovoked injuries. How, then, are we to conduct ourselves under them? The answer is, first, God forbids us, both in the Law and in the Gospel, to recompense evil for evil. The taking of private revenge, either inwardly or outwardly, is expressly prohibited. “Say not thou (no, not even in thine heart) I will recompense evil” (Prov. 20:22). We must not so much as allow the thought that some day I shall have an opportunity to get my own back. I am not even to hope it, still less resolve the same. The Christian should not desire or determine anything on which he cannot in faith ask God to assist him in: and most assuredly he would have no ground whatever to expect the Lord to help him in the execution of a malicious revenge.

We may not requite evil for evil in thought, word, or deed to those who mistreat us, but rather suffer injury and refer our cause to Him who is the judge of all the earth. Because this duty goes against our natural inclinations, let us mention one or two persuasions thereto. First, it is the expressly revealed will of God for us, and His commands are not grievous. Second, vengeance belongs unto the Lord, and if we take it upon ourselves to privately avenge our wrongs, then we rob Him of His right. Third, Christ has left us an example that we should follow *His* steps, and, “When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23); yea, when He was cruelly and unjustly crucified, He prayed for His persecutors. Finally, Christ has plainly warned us that if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will God forgive ours (Matt. 6:15).

But now we must face the question, *How far* this precept, “Resist not evil,” is binding upon us: is it to be regarded absolutely? Does it recognize no limitation and make no allowance for exceptions? Is the Christian to passively endure all wrong? Here is where we must seek guidance from the Analogy of Faith, or in other words, ascertain the teaching of collateral passages. If this is done, it will be found that while our text enunciates a principle of general application, it is not a *universal* one. To deduce from it the doctrine of unlimited non-resistance to evil is to pervert its teaching, and to exalt the letter above the spirit—just as to insist that the plucking out of a right eye which offends or the cutting off of an offending right hand (vv. 29, 30) must be understood and obeyed literally, would be to entirely miss our Lord’s meaning in those verses.

First, the teaching of Christ elsewhere manifestly forbids us to understand, “Resist not evil,” in an unqualified and universal sense. He gave explicit directions to His disciples concerning their duty toward those who wronged them: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen and a publican” (Matt. 18:15-17). Now that is very definite resistance to evil: it challenges the wrong done, ex-

amines the offense, and punishes the wrongdoer. There are more ways of resistance to evil than the employment of physical force.

Second, the idea of an unqualified non-resistance to evil is contrary to the example of Christ. He resisted evil, attacked wrong-doers, and when smitten did not turn the other cheek. When He went up to Jerusalem and found His Father's House turned into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves, He made a scourge of small cords and cast out of the Temple both sheep and oxen. He scattered the money of the desecraters and overthrew their tables (John 2:13-15). On another occasion He drove them out, stopped the service, and refused to let any man carry a vessel through the Temple (Mark 11:15-16). That was not passive resistance, but vigorous aggression. In the judgment hall of Caiaphas one of the officers struck the Saviour with his hand, but instead of turning the other cheek Christ challenge the smiter (John 18:22, 23). He did not answer force with force and return blow for blow, but He exposed and rebuked the wrong.

Third, were we to offer no resistance whatever unto injuries inflicted upon us, no matter what their nature, or who their perpetrators, then we should fail in supporting and co-operating with the Divine ordinance of the magistrate, and be guilty of abetting evil-doers. The magistrate is God's lieutenant, His minister for vindicating the oppressed, and punishing criminals. Under certain circumstances it would be our bounden duty to seek the protection and help of the officers of the law, for they are one of God's means for preserving order in the community. If it be right for me to bring an offending brother before the church—the well-being of the church requiring that he should be purged if he be rebellious; then by what principle can it be wrong for me to summon a law-breaker before the magistrate, in cases where the good of the community obviously requires it?

“This command of our Lord, illustrated by the examples He brings forward, plainly does not forbid us to defend ourselves when we are in danger. To do so is one of the strongest instincts of our nature, the Law of God written on our hearts. But with regard to personal injuries, when there is no hazard of life, as in the case specified, it is our duty to repress resentment and to abstain from violence. In like manner, there are cases in which it is plainly a man's duty to avail himself of the protection which the law gives to property. Justice to his creditors, to the public, to his family, may require him to defend his estate, though even this *must not be done* under the impulse of *private revenge*. But we ought to have resort to the tribunals of justice only when the cause is important and the call urgent; we are to prosecute our claims with humanity, moderation, and a spirit of peace; we are to be content with reasonable satisfaction” (John Brown).

When the injury received is a personal and private one it is the Christian's duty to bear it in the spirit of meekness so long as by so doing he is not encouraging evil-doers and thereby rendering them a menace to others. If I am walking on the sidewalk and a drunken motorist mounts the curb, knocks me down, and then drives off, it is plainly my duty to take the number of his car, report the offense to the police, and if required, bear witness in the court. So, too, when a wrong is done to others for whom we are responsible, resistance becomes a duty. If a man's child was in peril at the hands of some human fiend, is he to stand by and see it outraged or murdered? Did not Abraham, the friend of God, and the “father of all them that believe,” arm his servants, smite those who had taken his nephew prisoner, and free him (Gen. 14:14-16)?

As we have so often pointed out in these pages, every truth of Scripture has a balancing one, and it is only by heeding the same that we are preserved from going to an unwarrantable ex-

treme. Examples of those guilty of lopsidedness, not only in doctrine but in practice, are numerous. As there are those who put to a false use Christ's, "sware not at all" (Matt. 5:34), so there are not lacking others who place an unjustifiable interpretation upon His, "resist not evil." They suppose that in this dispensation of grace it is the will of God that His children should allow the principle of grace to regulate all their actions. But certainly it is not God's will that the principle of grace should override and swallow up all other principles of action. The requirements of justice and the demands of holiness are also to be honoured by the Christian. Here, too, grace is to reign "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21) and not at the expense of it.

The same rule applies to other matters. Abstention from going to law is a sound rule of life. It is a man's wisdom, generally speaking, to keep free of litigation. The Apostle condemned the Corinthians because they took their contentions before the civil courts. But is a man, is a Christian, never to resort unto law? What right have we to enjoy the social and civil privileges of a community if we ignore its obligations? Even though we may forgive an offense against our property, have we no responsibility to our neighbours? If I corner a burglar in my house, am I at liberty to turn loose upon society one who will plunder its property and imperil its security? There are times when it is the clear duty of a Christian to hand a law-breaker over to the law.

But now: exceptions do not nullify a rule, rather do they prove it. Care then must be taken lest in turning from the letter we lose the spirit of these precepts. "Resist not evil" is a plain command of Christ's and as such it is binding upon us. His follower is to be a man of peace, meekness, enduring wrong, suffering loss, accepting hardship, full of compassion and simple faith. A contentious spirit is evil: to be ever wrangling and always on the defensive is not Christian. Going to law as a rule is neither seemly nor wise. But all of that pertains to the *negative* side: as we shall yet see, there is a positive one, too. Good must be returned for evil, for only by good can evil be overcome. Our business is not the punishment of sinners, but the desiring and seeking after their salvation. Such was the life of our Lord, and such also must be ours.

The very fact that the Lord Jesus here designated the evil-doer, "the evil one," makes it clear to us that it is the characteristic of an evil man to inflict injury upon others. The giving of this title to the wrong-doer helps us understand that if we retaliate in the same wicked spirit, then we necessarily place ourselves in the same class to which he belongs. We are therefore to suffer wrong patiently. There are but two classes in the world: the good and the evil—and it is the mark of the *former* that they do good unto all. They who do evil evidence their likeness to the Evil One; whereas the prosecution of that which is good is Godlike. If we set ourselves to do harm unto others, either by word or deed, we are in the sight of God evil men: such are usurers and extortioners, profiteers, fraudulent traders, those engaged in any enterprise which subverts morality, underminers of health, Sabbath-breakers. The Christian, then, must separate himself from all such callings, and (though it entails a smaller salary) engage in that which is pleasing to God.

Although by nature fallen men are likened unto untamed beasts and fierce animals resembling the "wild asses' colt" (Job. 11:12), the lion, the leopard, the wolf, the cockatrice (Isa. 11:6-8), whose nature it is to hurt and devour other creatures—when God, in His infinite mercy, is pleased to work in them a miracle of grace, bestow upon them spiritual life and reconcile them to Himself, then they lay aside their enmity and fierceness and live in peace with one another, so that the ancient saying is fulfilled, "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain" (Isa. 11:9). It is a property of Christ's kingdom that His subjects shall "beat their swords into plow-

shares and their spears into pruninghooks” (Micah 4:3)—weapons of bloodshed being transmuted into instruments of usefulness. When men are truly converted, they lay aside malice and wrath and become the doers and promoters of good. This was notably exemplified in the case of Paul, who from a fierce persecutor was transformed into a preacher of the Gospel of peace.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

Introduction.

The office which Elijah filled supplies an important key to an understanding of the times in which he lived and the character of his mission. He was a *Prophet*, in fact one of the most remarkable pertaining to that Divine order. Now there is a real and marked difference between a servant of God and a Prophet of God, for while all His Prophets are servants yet not all of His servants are Prophets. Prophecy always presupposes *failure* and sin. God only sent forth one of His Prophets in a time of marked declension and departure of the people from Himself. As this is not generally known, we propose to labour the point and furnish Scripture proofs of our assertion. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light which shineth in a *dark place*" (2 Peter 1:19): that expresses the general principle.

How many of our readers can recall the very first prophecy recorded in Holy Writ? Well, it is found in, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). And *when* was that initial prophecy given? Not while our first parents walked in obedience to and fellowship with the Lord God, but after they had sinned against Him and broken His commandments. Let this be duly noted and carefully pondered, for like the first mention of anything in the Scriptures, it is of deep moment, intimating the nature and design of all subsequent prophecy. This initial prediction, then, was not furnished by God while the original bliss of Eden obtained, but after it had been rudely shattered. It was supplied *after* mankind had rebelled and apostatized.

And now a harder question: How many of our readers can name the first Prophet of God mentioned in the Scriptures? In order to find the answer we have to turn to the Epistle of Jude, where we are told, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, *prophesied* of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds," etc (vv. 14, 15). Here again we see the same principle illustrated and the same fact exemplified. Enoch the Prophet lived in a day of abounding wickedness. He was contemporary with Noah, when "the earth was filled with violence," and "all flesh had corrupted His (God's) way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11, 12). The ministry of Enoch, then, was exercised some time previous to the great Flood, and he was raised up to call upon men to forsake their sins and to announce the certainty of Divine judgment falling upon them should they refuse to do so.

Who are the next men referred to in Scripture as being "Prophets" of God? The answer may surprise some of our readers: they are none other than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Psalm 105 we read, "He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My Prophets no harm" (vv. 14, 15). The context clearly identifies these "Prophets." "He hath remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance" (vv. 8-11). And why were the Patriarchs denominated "Prophets"? That which has been before us in the preceding paragraphs supplies the answer, and the title here given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is to be explained on the same principle. A new and fearful evil had entered the world, and God called

out the Patriarchs separating them from it, so that by their lips and lives they were witnesses against it.

That evil was, *idolatry*. So far as Scripture reveals, idols were not worshipped by men previous to the Flood. But soon after the great deluge idolatry not only obtained a footing, but became general. "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor; and they served *other gods*" (Josh. 24:2). It is to that very period in ancient history—namely, to the days of Nimrod and onwards—that Romans 1:22, 23 looks back: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." An incidental reference, which however may be regarded as symptomatic of general conditions, is contained in, "Rachel had stolen the *images* that were her father's" (Gen. 31:19). It was from this awful sin of idolatry that the Patriarchs were separated, to serve as "Prophets"—witnesses for the true God. Thus we see once more that the bringing in of the Prophet was in the face of *apostasy*.

Passing down the stream of human history, let us next consider the case of the chosen Nation. Jehovah had separated the Hebrews unto Himself as His favoured people. Called out of Egypt, they were first brought into a place of isolation: the Wilderness. There the tabernacle of worship and witness was erected, laws were given to Israel, and the priesthood was instituted. We read of princes, elders, and judges in the congregation, but no mention whatever is made of any order of "Prophets" being appointed. Why is this? Because there was no *need* for them. So long as Israel walked in obedience to and fellowship with the Lord and worshipped Him according to His institutions, no "Prophet" was required! This is a fact which has not received the attention it deserves. While the life of Israel remained normal there was a place for the teacher, the Levite, and the magistrate; but no room whatever for the prophetic function.

But after Israel entered the land of Canaan and Joshua was removed from their head, what we have pointed out above no longer obtained. At a later date in Israel's history we *do* find God sending Prophets unto them. Why? *Because the priesthood had failed* and the people had departed from God. History repeated itself: the Divine mercies were abused, the Divine Law was flouted the servants of God lamentably failed in the discharge of their duties. Corruption set in and there was grievous and widespread departure from the Lord. Then it was that He instituted the prophetic order in Israel. And *who* was it that headed the long list of Israel's Prophets? This is not an unimportant question: Acts 3:24 tells us: "Yea, and all the Prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."

Samuel, then, was the first of Israel's Prophets. He was raised up by God at a most critical juncture in their history, when true piety had sunk to a very low level and when wickedness flouted itself in high places. So fearful had things become, so far had the fear of God departed from their eyes, that the sons of the high priest himself pilfered part of the holy sacrifices: "The sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:17). So lost were they not only to a veneration of what was sacred, but also to a sense of decency, that they "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (v. 22). Though Eli remonstrated with them, yet "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father" (v. 25). In consequence, they were slain by Divine judgment, the ark of the Lord was carried away by the Philistines, and "Ichabod" was written over the Nation. Samuel,

then, was raised up at a time of great declension, when, "There was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

Now all that has been before us supplies the key to an understanding of those books in the Old Testament which are more definitely known as "The Prophets." Their messages were addressed to a degenerate and wayward people. Let us give a quotation from the first three of them. "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people *laden with iniquity*, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward" (Isa. 1:1-4). "Thus saith the Lord, what iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me and have walked after vanity" (Jer. 2:5 and see verses 6-9). "Son of man I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against Me" (Ezek. 2:3 and see verses 4-9).

The same principle holds good throughout the New Testament. The first preacher there introduced to us is John the Baptist: and what was the outstanding characteristic of his ministry? Not that of an evangelist, not that of a teacher, but rather *the Prophet*—"He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Why so? Because God sent John unto a people who had departed from Him, to a people laden with iniquities, yet self-righteous in their sins. John was a Divine protest against the rottenness of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Though the son of a priest, John never ministered in the temple, nor was his voice heard in Jerusalem. Instead he was a voice crying in the wilderness: placed on *the outside* of all organized religion. He was a true Prophet, calling upon the people to repent and flee from the wrath to come.

Take the ministry of Christ. In Him we see every office combined: He was Prophet, Priest and King. He was both Evangelist and Teacher, yet during His earthly ministry that which was the more prominent was the exercise of His Prophetic office. Of old Jehovah had declared to Moses, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him" (Deut. 18:18). But let us carefully note the particular stage in His ministry when Christ began to utter prophecies as such. Most of our readers will recall there are quite a number of predictions which He made concerning His second advent, but they may not have observed that none of them was given during the early days of His service. The Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 5 to 7) contains none at all. The great prophecy of Matthew's Gospel is found near the end (24, 25), *after* the leaders of the Nation had rejected Him!

The same general principle—declension and departure from God as the dark background before which the Prophet stands out—receives further illustration in the writings of the Apostles. In them some striking and most important predictions are to be met with; but mark attentively where they are located. The principal ones, those which enter into fullest detail, are usually to be found in the *second* Epistles—2 Thessalonians 2; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 2. Why is this? Ah, why was a second Epistle necessary? Because the first failed to accomplish its proper end. Finally, let

us ask, which is the one book of the New Testament that is outstandingly Prophetic in its character and contents? Why, the Revelation. And where is it to be found? At the very close of the New Testament, tracing as it does the course of Christendom's apostasy and describing the judgments of God upon the same.

Now there is one thing very noticeable about the Prophets of God, no matter in what day or age they lived: we always find them walking alone with God, *in separation from* the religious apostasy around them. It was so with Enoch: he "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24)—denoting his aloofness from the surrounding evil. It was thus with the Patriarchs: "By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb. 11:9). So isolated was the Prophet Samuel that when Saul sought unto him he had to make inquiry as to his abode (1 Sam. 9:11, 12). As we have seen, the same thing held good of John the Baptist: he was in marked separation from the organized religion of his day. So now the servants of God are commanded to "turn away" from those "having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5).

Another thing which has marked the Prophets of God is that they were not accredited by the religious systems of their day: they neither belonged to, nor were they endorsed by them. What was there that Enoch and the Patriarchs could possibly "belong" to or "hold membership in"? How could Samuel or Elijah have any personal fellowship with the apostate Judaism of their day? How was it morally possible for John the Baptist to exercise his ministry within the precincts of the degenerate temple of Jerusalem? In consequence of their separation from the God-dishonouring systems of their day, they were despised, hated and persecuted by the religious leaders, and in the eyes of their satellites were most unpopular. The same principle obtains now. Where a denomination has repudiated (in doctrine or practice) the Truth, membership in it can only be retained at the price of unfaithfulness to God: "Have no *fellowship* with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

Another feature which ever characterized God's Prophets was the nature of their mission and message. This was twofold: to arouse a slumbering conscience and to comfort the hearts of God's people in a day of ruin. The first was accomplished by a faithful application of the Word of God to existing conditions, so as to awaken the people to a sense of their responsibility and guilt. The Divine Law was expounded and the holy claims of God insisted upon, so that it might appear how grievously the public had departed from Him. An uncompromising call to repentance was made: a demand to forsake their sins and return unto the Lord. The second was accomplished by directing the eyes of the saints above the ruin about them and fixing their hearts upon the future glory.

Finally, it remains to be pointed out that the message of God's Prophets was never heeded by more than an insignificant and fractional remnant. The great mass even of religious professors rejected it, for it did not suit their depraved tastes. There was never any corporate recovery! Human nature then was no different from what it is now: preaching upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the certainty of judgment to come has never been acceptable. It is the false Prophets who cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," who were ever the popular orators. "Speak unto us smooth things" (Isa. 30:10) is always the demand of the crowd, and those who refuse to yield to this clamour and instead faithfully preach the Truth, are dubbed "pessimists" and "kill-joys."

We return to the thought with which we opened: the particular office which Elijah sustained enables us to form an accurate judgment of the times in which his lot was cast, and the specific nature of his mission. The Prophet of Gilead appeared on the scene of action in one of the darkest hours in Israel's history. And here we will stop.—A.W.P.

THE HOLY SABBATH

8. *Its Observance.*

Last month we pointed out that the essential principles which should regulate us in the keeping of the Sabbath Day holy are a strict compliance with the letter of the Fourth Commandment and the discharge of the same in the spirit of the New Covenant. It seems to us that such a combination will best enable to preserve the balance, delivering us on the one hand from unwarrantable laxity, and on the other from undue rigour and Pharisaic excess. While it is to be emphatically insisted upon that the moral Law is as much binding on us today as ever it was upon the Jews, yet it must also be as unmistakably affirmed that the Christian receives the Law not from Moses but from the hands of Christ. It is not the irksome tasks of slaves, but the ready and joyous service of *sons* and *daughters* which God asks from believers.

It should be the diligent concern of the Christian to observe the Sabbath Day and to perform the duties required therein with a frame of mind becoming God's dear children, and in a spirit answering to the freedom and liberty of the Gospel. We are to serve God in all things "in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). That is to say, our obedience and worship is to be rendered unto God with a spirit of grace, joy, liberty, and a sound mind—and not in that darkness, dread, and servility which characterized the old covenant. In contrast from the blessed liberty wherewith Christ makes believers free, that which marked Judaism was a bondage frame of mind, so that their observance of the duties of the Law, and consequently of the Sabbath, were rendered in a servile spirit.

The Puritan John Owen pointed out three things tending thereto. First, the dreadful giving of the Law on Sinai. The fearful phenomena which accompanied the promulgation of the Law at that time was designed to strike terror not only into the generation who immediately witnessed it, but also throughout all generations of the Mosaic economy to awe the hearts of Israel with a dread and terror of it. In proof of this we find the Apostle declaring plainly that Mount Sinai "gendereth to bondage" (Gal. 4:24). It was the very nature of Judaism to bring its subjects into a spiritually servile state, and consequently although secretly on account of the ends of the covenant they were children and heirs, yet "they differed nothing from servants" (Gal. 4:1-3). It is the grand dispensational change brought in by Christ that is treated of in Galatians 4.

Again—the re-enforcement of the Adamic Covenant, with the promise and threat of it, necessarily produced the same effect upon the nation of Israel, for that covenant was binding upon them throughout the whole continuance of Judaism. True, the Moral Law had a new use and end given unto it at Sinai, yet those who received it were so much in the dark and the proposal of that new end and use was attended with so great an obscurity, that they could not look unto the comfort and liberty which was to be the grand outcome. "The Law made nothing perfect," and what was of grace in the administration of it was so veiled under typical ceremonies and shadows that they could not behold "the end" or design of that which was to be abolished (2 Cor. 3:13)—where the same grand dispensational change is also discussed.

Finally, the affixing of the death penalty to the Law increased this bondage. The grim prospect of death overshadowing disobedience would obviously inspire their service with terror, and this is exactly what it was designed to express and produce, so as to represent the original curse of the whole Law (Gal. 3:13). Thereby the majority of them were greatly awed and terrified, though a few of them, by special grace, were enabled to delight themselves in God and His holy

ordinances. By these things, then, was administered a “spirit of bondage to fear,” which by the Apostle is opposed to “the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father” (Rom. 8:15). From those things arose the many anxious scruples which were upon them in the observance of the Sabbath. Though they boasted they were the children of Abraham and never in bondage, yet the Saviour insisted that, whatever they pretended, they were not free until the Son should make them free (John 8:36).

If it were needful for the Apostle to remind the believing Hebrews that they did not go to Sinai, but to Mount Sion, to receive the Law, it is requisite that believers be taught the same today. “For *ye are not come* unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.) But *ye are come* unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:18-24).

Under the Gospel, Christians are delivered from all the terror-provoking considerations which brought the Jews into such spiritual bondage. They are connected with a radically different order of things, for “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26), which is but another way of saying that we receive the Law of our obedience from Jesus Christ, who speaks from Mount Sion, and who is to be heeded with a filial spirit of liberty (cf. Gal. 5:1). So far as Christians are concerned the Adamic covenant is absolutely abolished, nor is the remembrance of it anyway revived (Heb. 8:13), so that it should have any influence upon their minds. They have been taken into a Covenant full of peace and joy, for “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

In the Covenant of Grace we receive the spirit of Christ or adoption to serve God without legal fear (Luke 1:74; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), and there is not anything more insisted on in the Gospel as the principal privilege thereof. Nor would it be of any account to have liberty in the word and rule, if we had it not in the spirit and principle. It is by this Gospel liberty we are delivered from that anxious solicitude about particular instances in outward duties, which was a great part of the yoke imposed by the system of Judaism. It is most important and needful that this principle of evangelical freedom be insisted upon (for though the Fall has made us prone unto lawlessness, yet by nature we are also essentially legalistic), otherwise one of the most vital and fundamental elements of the Gospel will be submerged.

In all his duties, the Christian should look upon God as his *Father*, for through Christ both believing Jews and believing Gentiles have “access in one spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18). Our Father is not One who will “always chide,” nor does He “watch our steps” for our hurt. He is not One who binds upon us a grievous burden, but “knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust” (Psa. 103:14). He does not tie us down to rigid exactness in outward things, while we act in a holy spirit of filial obedience as His children. There is a vast difference between the duties of servants and sons, as there is between obeying a master and a parent. The consideration and application of this principle if it be regulated by the general rules laid down in the Word will resolve a thousand such scruples as perplexed the Jews of old.

Let it also be observed that our Father requires to be worshipped “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). He has far more respect to the inward frame of our hearts wherewith we serve Him, than He does to the mere outward performance of duties. The latter can only be accepted by Him as they are the expressions and demonstrations thereof. If, then, in our observance of the Holy Sabbath our hearts are single and sincere in our desires for His glory with delight, it is of more price with Him than the most rigid and punctilious observance of external duties by number and measure. “It hath been no small mistake that men have laboured more to multiply directions about external duties, giving them out as it were by number or tale, than to direct the inward man unto a due performance of the whole duty of the sanctification of the day according to the spirit and genius of Gospel obedience” (John Owen, to whom we are indebted for much of the above).

Here, then, is the essential difference between the Judaical and the Christian Sabbath: the minds of believers are no longer influenced to the duties of its observance by the curse of the Law and the terror thereof as represented in the threatened penalty of death. Instead it is love for the Person of Jesus Christ and respect for His authority which are the springs of their obedience. This cannot be insisted upon too strongly, for it marks the difference between a slavish and filial compliance. Consequently our main duty lies in an endeavour to obtain spiritual joy and delight in the services of this Day, as these are the special effects of spiritual liberty. Nor will this be difficult to attain if we are actively engaged in the privileges and blessings of the Gospel: the actings of faith upon the benefits secured for us by Christ cannot fail to produce deeper devotion, for faith ever works by love.

Those who have read this magazine for any length of time will scarcely need to be told that in what has been pointed out above we are far from joining hands with those who belittle the sanctity of the Lord’s Day and who contend that they are so delivered from the Law that they are free to please themselves (within the limitations of decency) as to how they show their respect for this ordinance. There is a world of difference between spiritual liberty and fleshly license. Those whom Christ makes free are freed *Godwards* and not *sinwards*. The Rule of obedience is the same for those who are now under the New Covenant as it was for those under the Old: it is the spring from which obedience proceeds which is altered. Then, it was the obedience of servants in terror of death for disobedience; now, it is the worship of sons out of gratitude to a loving Father.

Our first and chief concern must be to diligently see to it that the Lord is not robbed by us of any part of His due on the Sabbath Day; yet care needs also to be taken that we are not brought under bondage to “the commandments and doctrines of men.” It has to be admitted that some, with a zeal which was not according to knowledge, felt that the sanctification of the Lord’s Day could best be secured by multiplying the duties of piety. Accordingly, they drew up excessive directions regarding the same, both proscribing and prescribing that which lacked Scriptural authority for the same under the Gospel. When such a strictness is required that the saints cannot come up to it with a delight therein, then we may rightly suspect that the requirements laid down by God have been exceeded, and the inevitable result will be a swinging to the opposite extreme of laxity.

We cannot improve upon the ways of the Lord, and any attempt to do so must inevitably meet with failure. It is just as foolish to go beyond the Rule which He has given us, as it is wrong for us to come short thereof. Where He has particularized we must not generalize, and where He has

only generalized we should not dogmatically particularize. Is it not at this very point that one of the most outstanding differences between the two economies is to be found? Under the Mosaic God furnished detailed laws for the Jews to heed—laws which pertained to every phase of their lives—but under the Christian He has, in many instances, supplied us only with general principles for the regulation of our conduct. Considerable latitude is allowed us in the application of those principles to particular instances—as is clear from such passages as Romans 14:1-9; 1 Corinthians 8:8-9, etc. Those, then, who are not content with urging unto a compliance with such general principles, and instead, draw up a full code of specific regulations are contravening the genius of Christianity and inculcating the spirit of Judaism.

In order to prevent misunderstanding at this point, we call attention to one or two of the general principles enunciated in the Epistles, to which we must ever turn for full-orbed Christianity. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Here is expressed the fundamental principle for the regulating of practical godliness: this is the grand rule which is ever to guide us where express precepts are not supplied—self is to be denied and the eye fixed on God alone, so that we aim at honouring Him in everything. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). This is the general rule to regulate us in all the details of public worship as the former concerned more directly our domestic or private lives. It is a simple principle which, if heeded, will furnish guidance on many matters of church life concerning which the New Testament does not specifically legislate.

“Let all your things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:14). If this were duly attended to, how many disputes would be avoided, ill-feelings spared, and difficulties solved? All our affairs, domestically and ecclesiastically, should be regulated by love. Earnestness must not degenerate into bitterness, nor firmness into tyranny. If zeal be governed by love then excesses and cruelty will be obviated. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). Here is yet another general principle, which is to govern us in all our undertakings: our service is not to be forced but spontaneous, rendered not grudgingly but gladly. It will be noted that the chief emphasis in these general principles is thrown upon the *inward* springs of action rather than upon the outward performances themselves, and that they afford room for the exercise of sanctified common sense, moral instincts, and Spiritual intuitions.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father” (Isa. 58:13, 14). This is one of the many Old Testament predictions which relates chiefly to Gospel times—the section in which it occurs clearly denoting this, coming as it does after the death of Christ in Chapter 53. In it we may clearly discern the two leading principles which we have contended for throughout this article: the maintenance of the letter of the Fourth Commandment, and a compliance therewith in the spirit of the New Covenant. While there is much greater liberty under the Christian economy than there was under the Mosaic, yet the standard of holiness is not lowered nor are the requirements of God waived.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath.” This, it seems to us, has a twofold force: a general and a specific—if you refrain from trampling upon it, and if you abstain from journeying

and gadding about on that Day. The opening clause is explained by, “from doing thy pleasure on My holy day”: fleshly indulgence is no more permissible now than it was under the old covenant. This prohibition is specified in three details: “not doing thine own ways nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.” The Lord’s Day is not to be spent in seeking our secular interests, nor by engaging in worldly recreations, nor by vain and trifling conversation. Positively, we are to “call the Sabbath *a delight*, the holy of the Lord, honourable,” which agree with Psalm 118:24. The reward for such obedience (v. 14) must be understood of New Testament blessings expressed in Old Testament terminology.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

13. *Its Publication.*

In our last article we exposed the senselessness of those objections which are made against doctrinal preaching in general and the arguments which are leveled against the proclamation of predestination in particular. Then we started to point out some of the reasons why this grand Truth is to be published. First, because the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation are full of it. Second, because the Gospel cannot be Scripturally preached without it. The great commission given to the public servants of Christ, duly called and equipped by Him, reads thus, "Preach the Gospel" (Mark 16:15): not parts of it, but the whole of it. The Gospel is not to be preached piecemeal, but in its entirety, so that each Person in the Godhead is equally honoured. Just as far as the Gospel is mutilated, just so far as any branch of the evangelical system is suppressed, is the Gospel *not* preached. To begin at Calvary, or even at Bethlehem, is to begin in the middle: we must go right back to the eternal counsels of Divine grace.

Rightly did a renowned Reformer put it, "Election is the golden thread that runs through the whole Christian system . . . It is the bond which connects and keeps it together, which, without this, is like a system of sand ever ready to fall to pieces. It is the cement which holds the fabric together: nay, it is the very soul that animates the whole frame. It is so blended and interwoven with the entire scheme of Gospel doctrine that when the former is excluded, the latter bleeds to death. An ambassador is to deliver the whole message with which he is charged. He is to omit no part of it, but must declare the mind of the sovereign he represents, fully and without reserve. He is to say neither more nor less than the instructions of his court require, else he comes under displeasure, perhaps loses his head. Let the ministers of Christ weigh this well" (J. Zanchius, 1562).

Moreover the Gospel is to be preached "to every creature," that is, to all who frequent the Christian ministry, whether Jew or Gentile, young or old, rich or poor. All who wait upon the ministrations of God's servants have a right to hear the Gospel fully and clearly, without any part of it being kept back. Now an important part of the Gospel is the doctrine of election: God's eternal, free, and irreversible choice of certain persons in Christ to everlasting life. God foreknew that if the success of the preaching of Christ crucified were left contingent upon the response made to it by fallen men there would be a universal despising of the same. This is clear from, "They *all* with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18). Therefore did God determine that a remnant of Adam's children should be the eternal monuments of His mercy, and accordingly He decreed to bestow upon them a saving faith and repentance. *That* is Good News indeed: all rendered certain and immutable by the sovereign will of God!

Christ is the supreme Evangelist, and we find this doctrine was on His lips all through His ministry. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast *hid* these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 11:25, 26; 24:22; 25:34). "Unto *you* it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without (i.e. the pale of election) all these things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11). "Rejoice because your names are written in Heaven" (Luke 10:20). "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." "Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep." "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 6:37; 10:26; 15:16).

The same is true of the greatest of the Apostles. Take the first and chief of his Epistles, which is expressly devoted to an unfolding of “the Gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). In the 8th chapter he describes those who are, “the called according to His purpose” (v. 28), and in consequence of which they were “foreknown” and “predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son” (v. 29). The whole of the 9th chapter is devoted thereto: there he shows the difference which God made between Ishmael and Isaac, between Esau and Jacob, the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy. There he tells us that God has “mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (v. 18). Nor were these things written to a few persons in some obscure corner, but addressed to the saints at Rome, “which was, in effect, bringing this doctrine upon the stage of the whole world, stamping an universal imprimatur upon it and publishing it to believers at large throughout the earth” (Zanchius).

The doctrine of election is to be preached, third, because the grace of God cannot be maintained without it. Things have now come to such a sorry pass that the remainder of this article ought really to be devoted unto the elucidation and amplification of this important point; but we must content ourselves with some brief remarks. There are thousands of Arminian evangelists in Christendom today who deny predestination, either directly or indirectly, and yet suppose they are magnifying Divine grace. Their idea is that God, out of His great goodness and love, has provided salvation in Christ for the *whole* human family, and that such is what He now desires and seeks. It is the view of these men that God makes an offer of His saving grace through the Gospel message, makes it to the freewill of all who hear it—and that they can either accept or refuse it. But *that* is not “grace” at all!

Divine grace and human worthiness are as far apart as the poles, standing directly opposed the one to the other. But not so is the “grace” of the Arminian. If grace is merely something which is offered to me, something which I must improve if it is to do me any good, then my acceptance thereof is a meritorious *act*, and I have ground for boasting. If some refuse that grace and I receive it, then it must be (since it is wholly a matter of the freewill of the hearer) because *I* have more sense than they have, or because *my* heart is more tender than theirs, or because *my* will is less stubborn. And were the question put to me, “Who maketh thee to differ?” (1 Cor. 4:7), then the only truthful answer I could make would be to say, *I* made myself to differ, and thus place the crown of honour and glory upon *my own head*.

To this it may be replied by some, We believe that the heart of the natural man is hard and his will stubborn, but God in His grace sends the Holy Spirit, and He convicts men of sin and in the day of His visitation melts their hearts and seeks to woo them unto Christ—yet they must respond to His “sweet overtures” and cooperate with His “gracious influence.” Here the ground is forsaken that it is *wholly* a matter of man’s will. Yet here, too, we have nothing better than a burlesque of Divine grace. These very men affirm that many of those who are the subjects of these influences of the Spirit resist the same and perish. Thus, those that are saved, owe their salvation (in the final analysis) to *their* improving of the Spirit’s overtures—they “cooperate” with Him. In such a case the honours would be divided between the Spirit’s operations and *my* improvement of the same. But *that*, too, is not “grace” at all!

There are still others who seek to blunt the sharp edge of the Spirit’s sword by saying, We believe in the doctrine of predestination, though not as you Calvinists teach it. A single word serves to untie this knot for us—“foreknowledge.” Divine election is based upon Divine fore-

knowledge. God foresaw who would repent of their sins and accept Christ as their Saviour, and accordingly He chose *them* unto salvation. Here again human merits are dragged in. Grace is not free, but tied by the “decision” of the creature. Such a carnal concept as this *reverses* the order of Scripture, which teaches that the Divine foreknowledge is based upon the Divine purpose—God foreknows what will be because *He has decreed what shall be*. Note carefully the *order* in Acts 2:23 and Romans 8:28 (last clause) and 29. Nowhere does Holy Writ speak of God foreseeing or foreknowing our repentance and faith: it is always foreknowledge of persons and never of acts—“*whom* He did foreknow” and not “*what* He did foreknow.”

But does not Scripture say, “whosoever will, may come”? It does, and the all-important question is, where does the willingness come from in the case of those who respond to such an invitation? Men in their natural condition are unwilling: as Christ declared, “ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John 3:40). What, then, is the answer? This, “Thy people (says the Father to the Son—see context) shall be willing (to come) in the day of *My power*” (Psa. 110:3). It is *Divine* power, that, and nothing else, which makes the unwilling willing, which overcomes all their enmity and obstinacy, which impels or “draws” them to the feet of the Lord Jesus. The grace of God, my readers, is far more than a lovely concept to sing about—it is an almighty *power*, an invincible dynamic, a principle victorious over all resistance. “My grace (says God) is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9): it asks for no assistance from us. “By the grace of God (and not by my “cooperation”), I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15: 10), said the Apostle.

Divine grace has done far more than make possible the salvation of sinners: it makes *certain* the salvation of God’s chosen ones. It not only provides salvation for them, it brings salvation *to* them; and it does so in such a way that its honours are not shared by the creature. The doctrine of predestination batters down this Dagon-idol of “freewill” and human merits, for it tells us that if we have indeed willed and desired to lay hold of Christ and salvation by Him, then that very will and desire are the effect of God’s eternal purpose and the result of the efficacious workings of His grace, for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. And therefore do we glory only in the Lord and ascribe all the praise unto Him. This writer sought not the Lord, but hated, opposed, and endeavoured to banish Him from his thoughts—but the Lord sought him, smote him to the ground (like Saul of Tarsus), subdued his vile rebellion, and made him willing in the day of His power. That is Grace indeed—sovereign, amazing, triumphant grace!

Fourth, the doctrine of election is to be published because it *abases man*. Arminians imagine that *they* do so by declaring the total depravity of the human family, yet in their very next breath they contradict themselves by insisting on their ability to perform spiritual acts. The fact is that “total depravity” is merely a theological expression on their lips which they repeat like parrots for they understand not nor believe the terrible import of that term. The Fall has radically affected and corrupted every part and faculty of our being, and therefore if man is totally depraved it necessarily follows that unto *sin* our wills are completely enslaved. As man’s apostasy from God resulted in the darkening of his understanding, the defiling of his affections, the hardening of his heart, so it brought his will into complete bondage to Satan. He can no more free himself than can a worm under the foot of an elephant.

One of the marks of God’s people is that they have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3), and nothing is so well calculated to bring them into that state as the truth of election. Shut out

Divine predestination and you must bring in the doings of the *creature*, and that makes salvation contingent, and thus it is neither of *grace alone* nor of *works alone*, but a nauseating mixture. The man who thinks he can be saved without election must have some confidence in the flesh, no matter how strongly he may deny it. Just so long as we are persuaded that it lies in the power of our own wills to contribute *anything*, be it ever so little, unto our salvation, we remain in carnal confidence, and therefore are not truly humbled before God. It is not until we are brought to the place of self-despair—abandoning all hope in our own abilities—that we truly look outside of ourselves for deliverance.

When the truth of election is Divinely applied to our hearts we are brought to realize that salvation turns solely on the will of a sovereign God—“is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of *God* which showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). When we are granted a feeling sense of those words of Christ’s, “without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5), then our pride receives its death-wound. So long as we entertain the mad idea that we can lend a helping hand in the business of our salvation, there is no hope for us. But when we perceive, by God’s grace, that we are clay in the hands of the Divine Potter to be molded into vessels of honour or dishonour as pleases Him—then we shall renounce our own strength, despair of any self-assistance, and pray and submissively wait for the mighty operations of God—nor shall we pray and wait in vain.

Fifth, election is to be preached because it is a Divinely-appointed means of faith. One of the first effects produced in serious-minded hearers is to stir them unto earnestly inquiring, Am I one of the elect, and to diligently examine themselves before God. In many instances this leads to the painful discovery that their profession is an empty one, resting on nothing better than some “decision” made by them years before under emotional stress. Nothing is more calculated to reveal a sham conversion than a Scriptural setting forth of the birth marks of God’s elect. Those who are predestinated unto salvation are made the subjects of a miraculous work of grace in their hearts, and *that* is a vastly different thing from a creature-act of “deciding for Christ” or becoming a member of some church. Far more than a natural faith is required to unite the soul unto a supernatural Christ.

The preaching of election acts as a flail in separating the wheat from the chaff. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), and how can “the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1) be begotten and strengthened if the truth of election be suppressed? Divine foreordination does not set aside the use of means, but ensures the continuation and efficacy of them. God has pledged Himself to honour those who honour Him, and that preaching which brings most glory unto the Lord is what He most blesses. That is not always apparent now, but it will be made fully manifest in the Day to come when it will be seen that much which Christendom regarded as gold, silver, and precious stones, was naught but wood, hay and stubble. Salvation and *the knowledge of the Truth* are inseparably connected (1 Tim. 2:4), but how can men arrive at a saving knowledge of the Truth, if the most vital and basic part of it is withheld from them?

Sixth, election is to be preached because it incites to holiness. What can possibly be a more powerful incentive to piety than a heart which is overwhelmed by a sense of the sovereign and amazing grace of God! The realization that He set His heart upon me from all eternity, that He singled me out from many when I had no more claim upon His notice than they had. The realization that He chose me to be an object of His distinguishing favour—giving me unto Christ—inscribing my name in the Book of Life, and at His appointed time bringing me from death unto

life and giving me vital union with His dear Son! This indeed will fill me with gratitude and cause me to seek to honour and please Him. God's electing love for us begets in us an endless love for Him. There are no motives so sweet or so potent as the love of God constraining us.

Seventh, election is to be preached because it promotes the spirit of praise. Said the Apostle, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). How can it be otherwise? Gratitude must find vent in adoration. A sense of God's electing grace and everlasting love makes us bless Him as nothing else does. Christ Himself returned special thanks unto the Father for His discriminating mercy: Matthew 11:25. The gratitude of the Christian flows forth because of the regenerating and sanctifying operations of the Spirit—it is stirred afresh by the redemptive and intercessory work of Christ—but it must rise still higher and contemplate the first cause—the sovereign grace of the Father—which planned the whole of our salvation. As then election is the great matter of thanksgiving unto God, it must be freely preached to His people.

THE OPPRESSION OF MAN

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:134). In the former verse the man of God had begged grace with respect to internal enemies—to the bosom enemy, the flesh—that no sin might have dominion over him. Now he begs for deliverance from external enemies. The saints are not only exercised with *their* corruptions, but also with the malice of wicked men. We have to do both with sin and sinners—with temptations and persecutions. And therefore he desires first to be kept from sin, and after that from danger and trouble. Both are a trouble to us; they were so to David; and God can and will in time give us deliverance from both.

In the text we have, first, *a prayer for mercy*: “Deliver me from the oppression of man.” In the Hebrew it is “from the oppression of *Adam*,” the name of the first father, *for the posterity*. This term is put either by way of distinction, aggravation, or diminution. 1. Man by way of distinction. There is the oppression and tyranny of Satan and sin—but the Psalmist does not mean that now. 2. Man by way of aggravation. No creatures are so ravenous and destructive to one another as man. It is a shame that one man should oppress another. Beasts do not usually devour those of the same kind, but usually a man’s enemies are those of his own household. The nearer we are in bonds of alliance, the greater the hatred. We are of the same stock, and reason should tell everyone of us that we should do as we would be done to. Nay, of the same religion. We are cemented together by the blood of Christ, which obliges us to more brotherly kindness; and if we differ in a few things, we have more cause of alliance and relations enough to love one another more than we do. But for all this there is the oppression of man.

3. Man by way of diminution. To lessen the fear of this evil, the term “Adam” is given men, to show their *weakness* in comparison with God. Thou art God, but they that are so ready and forward to oppress and injure us are but men; Thou can easily overrule their power and break the yoke. I think this consideration chief because of other passages: “Thou wilt judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa. 10:18). The oppressors are but men of the earth, a piece of red clay—frail men, that must within a while be laid in the dust. But it is more emphatically expressed: “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if were ready to destroy? And where is now the rage of the oppressor?” (Isa. 51:12, 13). When you have the immortal and almighty God to be your Protector, should you be afraid of a weak mortal man that is but Adam—a little enlivened dust? Within a little while he and all his fury is over and gone.

In the text we have, second, *a resolution and promise of duty*: “I will keep Thy precepts.” This is a constant observation of all God’s commandments. If God would interpose for his rescue. But did David do well to suspend his obedience upon so uncertain a condition? I answer—No. We must not understand it so as if he did bargain with God upon those terms and not otherwise; or as if before he had not kept them, and would now begin to. No, he would keep them; only this would be a new engagement to press him to keep them more constantly and more accurately. Look throughout this Psalm, and you shall find David still at his duty whatever his condition is. “The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from Thy law” (v. 51)—there he is scorned, but not discouraged. “The hands of the wicked have robbed me; yet

have I not forgotten Thy law” (v. 61)—there he is plundered, yet not discouraged. “The proud have forged a lie against me but I will keep Thy precepts with my whole heart” (v. 69)—falsely accused but not discouraged. His meaning was not that he would serve God no longer unless He would deliver him, but that he should have a *new obligation*—this should engage us afresh. He does beforehand promise that he would walk with God more closely.

From the text thus opened, we have these points:—First, deliverance from oppression is a blessing to be sought from the hands of God in *prayer*. Second, when God delivers us from the oppression of man, we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. Third, when we are praying for deliverance, we may interpose a promise for obedience. I will develop the first point by answering the question *why*, and then show you *how*. Why? This may be strengthened by these reasons—

First, we have liberty to ask for temporal things. Many think it too carnal to pray for health, food and raiment, long life, temporal deliverance. But what God has promised we may lawfully pray for: a prayer is but a promise sued for. These blessings are adopted into the covenant, as being useful to us in our journey; and therefore we may ask for them. Christ has taught us to pray that we may ask: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Protection and maintenance we ask for, as well as pardon and grace. It conduces to the honour of God that we *should* ask these things of Him, that we may testify our dependence, and acknowledge His inspection and government over all the affairs of the world. “He hath prepared His throne for judgment” (Psa. 9:7). Courts of justice among men are not always open to hear the plaintiff, but the Lord holds court continually: we may come to Him every day. He has prepared His throne to this end: to hear the petitions of His people when they are oppressed.

Second, our spiritual welfare is concerned in such temporal deliverances that we may serve God without impediment or distraction. The oppression of man is an impediment: it takes us away from many opportunities of service and bringing honour to God. “Pray that your flight be not in winter or on the Sabbath Day” (Matt. 24:20). Though it were lawful, it was grievous to the body to have flight in winter; to the soul to have it on the Sabbath. “Oppression will make a wise man mad” (Eccl. 7:7): it will discompose our spirits. Therefore it being so that oppression is ever reckoned among the temptations, we may pray not to enter into it.

Third, the glory of God is concerned. His people will honour Him more if one, especially an eminent one, be delivered from the oppression of men: “Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name” (Psa. 142:7). Besides the honour done to God by His people, He will more manifest Himself and His justice to the world. “The LORD is known by the judgments which He executeth” (Psa. 9:16). The world is led by sense: God will not be regarded as a Friend to persecutors. In short, it is not for the honour of God that His people should be left under oppression, as if He sought not after and cared for their welfare. Note how the afflicted condition of the church is called “the reproach of the heathen” (Ezek. 36:30). The heathen would cast this in their teeth, as if their God had no respect for them or were not able to help them.

Fourth, prayer engages us to constancy. God’s deliverance will be better for us than our own; that is, than those sinful shifts and ways of escape that we can devise. What we ask of God must be had in God’s way. It binds us to seek no other way of escape than we can commend to God’s blessing in prayer. It is said of the saints: they “were tortured, not accepting deliverance: that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35). Would any refuse deliverance when it is

tendered to them? Yes, upon such spiteful conditions: they were commanded to do something contrary to the laws of God, and therefore they preferred God's deliverance and not their own.

Fifth, seeking deliverance at the hands of God does ease the heart of a great deal of trouble, and deliver it from those inordinate affections and tormenting passions which otherwise the oppression of man might raise in us—fear, grief, anger, envy, despair, dread to suffer more, sorrow for what we suffer already, anger and envy against those oppressors by whom we suffer, and despair because of the continuance of our molestations. All these are mischiefs to the soul, but can be cured by prayer.

1. *Fear*, because of the mightiness of them that oppress, or threaten to oppress. We are told that “the fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). We are full of distracting thoughts, and if we cherish them they will weaken our trust in God and dependence upon His promises. Nay, the mischief will not stop there: they who trust not God, can never be true to Him: we shall run to carnal shifts and fearing men more than God do things displeasing to Him. But how shall we ease our hearts of this burden? By prayer? Partly, because then we use our fear aright when it only drives us to seek God's protection: “Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 20:3). And partly because prayer discovers a higher object of fear: the fear of God drives out the fear of man. In God's strength we may defy enemies: see Psalm 27:1.

2. *Grief*. It clogs the heart and stays the wheels so that we drive on heavily in the spiritual life. Worldly sorrow works death (2 Cor. 7:10): it brings on hardness of heart and quenches all our vigour. “By sorrow of heart the spirit is broken” (Prov. 15:13). A heavy heart does little to the purpose for God. Now how shall we get rid of this? The cure is by prayer. For vent gives ease to all our passions. “Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). As when wind gets into the caverns of the earth, it causes terrible convulsions and earthquakes till it get a vent: so the mind is eased when we can pour out our care into the bosom of God, and wait till deliverance comes from above.

3. *The violent passions* of anger, envy, and revenge against oppressors: these are all for naught and do a world of mischief. Anger discomposes us, and transports the soul into uncomely motions against God and men, making us fret, and tempting us to atheism (Psa. 73); making us weary in well doing (Psa. 37). The Devil works upon such discontent, and we are apt to run into these disorders. How shall we get rid of these distempers? By *prayer*, in which we get a sight of the other World, and then these things will seem nothing to us. Prayer acquaints ourselves with God and the process of His providence, and so we shall see an end of things (Psa. 73:17); then all is quiet. And so for revenge, that, too, is an effect of the former. When we plead before God we see the justice of what is unjust, and hard dealings from men to be justly inflicted by God; and so the heart is calmed—“*the Lord* bid him curse” (2 Sam. 16:11). Our very praying is a committing ourselves to Him that judges righteously, and therefore we ought not, we *need* not, avenge ourselves.

4. *Impatience and despair*. This is a very great evil, contrary to faith and hope and dependence, which the Christian religion does mainly establish; and makes way for the worst ends—either total apostasy from God, or atheism, or self-destruction. Now this is very detrimental to us when oppressions lie long upon us: “this evil is from the LORD; why should I wait on the LORD

any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33). "But thou saidest, There is no hope" (Jer. 2:25). Desperate! "No, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go": I will take my own course: there is no hope—it is vain to wait upon the Lord any longer. And even if things do not grow to that height, yet the children of God become wary and faint in their minds (Heb. 12:3). Now we must keep afoot some hope while we have a heart to call upon God. The suit is still pending in the court of Heaven when it seems to be over on earth: and we see there is cause to wait for God's answer. "He that shall come, will come" (Heb. 10:37). God may tarry long, but will never come too late.

N.B. The above, slightly condensed, is part of a sermon by the Puritan Thomas Manton. The remainder of the sermon will appear in the February issue (D.V.).

