

Volume 18—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 7
July, 1939
BIBLE STUDY.

From our correspondence we gather that in these strenuous days, there are not a few who deplore the fact that they do not now have the time available for serious reading which they once had. Working conditions are so exacting, competition is so keen and ruthless, the pace has become so feverish, that the majority are too exhausted at the close of the day to apply themselves in the evening to anything which involves much effort. We sympathize with these weary toilers, and would offer to them the following remarks. First, God is no Egyptian taskmaster, laying upon us a burden grievous to be borne. Second, there is nothing more restful to the nerves and relief-bringing to an over-taxed mind than half an hour spent alone with God; say five minutes in reading a Psalm or a portion from the Gospels, 15 or 20 minutes at the Throne of Grace—thanking God for the mercies of the day, pouring out to Him our troubles, seeking fresh supplies of grace: and then reading a chapter from the Epistles. Third, retire to rest half an hour sooner than you have been doing, and rise that much earlier in the morning, so as to spend it with God, preparing yourself for the demands of the day. Fourth, be most particular in seeing to it that you spend several hours on the Sabbath over God's Word and reading edifying books. It is not honouring to the Lord for you to rush from one meeting to another and leave yourself little opportunity for private devotions.

But there is another class of young people or those not so hardly pressed by the exigencies of modern life, who write and ask us what we consider to be "the best way to study the Bible." Recently it has struck us that the term "study" in this relation has an egotistical sound and savours of carnality. Is it not almost irreverent to employ this language here—a dragging down of the holy and unique Word of God to the level of mere human productions? Is it a clear brain or a sensitive conscience which is most essential for profiting from Divine revelation? and which is more likely to be called into exercise by close "study"? "What method do you recommend for studying the Bible?" Does not such a question seem to indicate that the inquirer supposes the Sacred Scriptures to be addressed chiefly to the intellect? The questioner may not be conscious of this (for the heart is very deceitful), yet is not that what is really implied? Can you imagine one who had received a missive from his sweetheart proposing to sit down and "study" it? Would not that expression be altogether incongruous in such a connection?

But has not God Himself exhorted us to "study" His Word? Where? In what passage? The actual term "study" occurs but five times in the Bible. Twice in Proverbs (15:28; 24:2) where it signifies to "meditate" beforehand; once in Ecclesiastes 12:12; again in 1 Thessalonians 4:11—"Study to be quiet"; and finally, "study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), which is addressed to the preacher, and means he is to make it his paramount concern to endeavour to please God in all things, and is to spare no pains in equipping himself to minister the Word in season to needy souls, so that each may receive a suitable portion. Neither the verse itself nor the context has any reference to partitioning off the Scriptures, allotting one book to this dispensation and another book to that dispensation—which is a subtle device of the Enemy to rob God's children of many needed parts of their spiritual bread.

Are we intimating, then, that the rank and file of God's people should devote less time to the Scriptures, or that they should be encouraged to scan them superficially? No, indeed—God forbid! That against which we are here protesting is the God-dishonouring idea that His Word is merely a piece of literature, which may be "mastered" by a course of "study." That which we would warn against is an undue occupation with the technical aspects of the Bible. By all means read and re-read the whole Bible through consecutively, so as to become acquainted with its contents. By all means, "search the Scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11) in order to test all you hear and read—"compare" one part with another, so that you may obtain fuller light upon what is before you. Pray constantly for the guidance and illumination of the Spirit, that He may open to you its Divine mysteries; slowly ponder each word in every verse. Above all, beg God to write His Word more legibly and fully upon the tablets of your heart.

God's blessed Word is not for dissection by the knife of cold intellectuality, but is to be laid to heart. It is not given for us to display our cleverness and "brilliance" upon, but to be bowed before in true humility. It is not designed for mental entertainment, but for the regulation of our daily lives. Far, far more important than "method" is our *motive* when approaching the Word. Not to acquire that which will puff us up in our own conceits, but that which will subdue pride and bring us as supplicants to the footstool of Mercy, is what we should seek. Of what value is a knowledge of the original Hebrew and Greek, or a thorough acquaintance with the history, geography, and chronology of the Bible, if the heart be left cold and hard toward its Author? We very much doubt then, if this word "study" is an appropriate one to apply unto our perusal of the inspired page. What would be thought of a child, away from home, saying he was going to "study" the letters he had received from his parents? And the Bible consists of a series of letters from the Heavenly Father to His dear children. Then let us cherish them as such, and act accordingly.

As we wrote recently to two young friends in the U.S.A.: "I wonder if you will be surprised when I say that, I seriously doubt if God has called or requires *you* to 'study' His Word—what you need to do is FEED thereon. How much nourishment would your body derive from a study of the chemical properties of cereals and fruits, or from seeking to ascertain the various sorts of soil in which they are grown or the different types from which they are derived, or the meaning of their Latin names? None whatever. And I am persuaded that much of the modern 'study of the Bible' is equally profitless spiritually. True, such a study as I have mentioned above, would feed pride—acquiring a knowledge which many of your fellows possess not; but would it aid digestion?"

Would it not be more practicable to pay closer attention to securing a nutritious and *balanced* diet? Would it not be more profitable if you gave greater attention to the mastication of your food? So it is, dear friends, with our spiritual food." "Desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). That is the only nutritive food for the soul! Dwell not so exclusively upon favourite books of Scripture that you neglect others equally needful, but vary your reading, and then you will obtain a balanced diet. Memorize a verse or two every day and meditate thereon whenever you have a few spare moments, even when journeying to and from your work, and then you will masticate your Food. Put the precepts into practice, heed the warnings of Scripture, and then you will assimilate what you have fed upon.—A.W.P.

N.B.—It should hardly be necessary for us to point out that this brief editorial is not designed for preachers and teachers.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

11. *The Law and Adultery:* Matthew 5:27-32.

Let us begin by pointing out once more that the several distinctions drawn by Christ in this Discourse between what had been said in ancient times upon a number of matters of moral and religious duty, and what He now affirmed, must have respect not to the real teaching of the Law and the Prophets but to the inadequate and erroneous views entertained of their teaching by the Rabbis and the false notions founded upon them. After so solemnly and expressly declaring His entire harmony with the Law and the Prophets (5:17-20), we must regard with abhorrence the idea that Christ, immediately after, proceeded to pit Himself against them, affirming that Moses taught one thing and He quite another. No—in every instance where a commandment is quoted as among the things said in former times, it was the understanding and views entertained thereof against which the Lord directed His authoritative deliverances. It is not the Law *per se* which is under consideration, but the carnal interpretations of it made by the Pharisees.

It should prove a real help to the reader if he looks upon Matthew 5:20 as the text of this third division of the Sermon, and all that follows to the end of chapter five as an enlargement thereof. That verse enunciated a most important practical truth, and the verses which immediately follow contain a series of illustrative examples of how and wherein the righteousness of the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. First, the Law-giver Himself had freed the Sixth Commandment from the rubbish which carnal men had heaped upon it (vv. 21-26), and now He proceeded to restore the Seventh Commandment to its true sense and meaning, and therefore to its proper use, purging it from the false interpretation of the Jews. Thus in the verses which are now before us we have the Saviour contrasting the righteousness of His Kingdom with the righteousness of the religious leaders of His day respecting the all-important matter of chastity.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery” (v. 27). Again we would carefully note that Christ did not say, “Ye know that God said at Sinai,” but instead “ye have heard that it was said by *them* of old time.” This makes it quite clear that He was continuing to refute the injurious traditions which the Jews had accepted from their elders: “Them of old time” referring to the ancient teachers—compare our comments on verse 21. “Thou shalt not commit adultery”; those were indeed the actual words of the Holy Spirit, but the preceding clause makes it plain that our Lord was alluding to them in the sense in which the Scribes and Pharisees understood them. They saw in the Seventh Commandment nothing more than the bare injunction, “No man shall lie with another man’s wife,” and hence they thought that so long as men abstained from that particular sin, they met the requirements of this precept.

The ancient rabbis, echoed by the Pharisees, restricted the scope of the Seventh Commandment to the bare act of unlawful intercourse with a married woman. But they should have perceived, as in the case of the Sixth Commandment, the seventh spoke specifically of only the culminating crime, leaving the conscience of the hearer to infer that *anything* which partook of its nature or was calculated to lead up to the overt deed was also and equally forbidden, even the secret thought of unlawful lust. That the Pharisees *did* narrow the meaning of the Seventh Commandment to the mere outward act of impurity, is evident from our Lord’s contrastive exposition of it in the next verse, where He insists that

its true intent had a much wider scope, reaching also to the inward affections, prohibiting all impure thoughts and desires of the heart.

Once more we are shown the vast difference there is between the spiritual requirements of a holy God and the low standard which is deemed sufficient by His fallen creatures. The religion of carnal and worldly men is merely *political*; so far as good and evil affects society, they are in some measure concerned—but as to the honour and glory of God, they have no regard. So long as the outside of the cup and of the platter be clean, they are indifferent to whatever filth may exist within (Matt. 23:25, 26). So long as the external conduct of its citizens be law-abiding, the State is satisfied, no matter what iniquity may be seething in their minds. Different by far is it with the Judge of all the earth—“The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on *the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7). That which the world pays no attention to, God regards as of first importance, for “out of it (the heart) are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). It is only “the pure in heart” who shall ever see—commune with, and eternally enjoy—God (Matt. 5:8).

In what has just been before us we may see a very real warning against a *slavish literalism*, which has ever been the refuge into which not a few errorists have betaken themselves. In this instance the Pharisees kept themselves close to the letter of the Word, but sadly failed to understand and insist upon its *spiritual* purport. Papists seek to justify their erroneous dogma of transubstantiation by an appeal to the very words of Christ, “this is My body,” insisting on the literal sense of His language. Unitarians seek to shelter behind His declaration, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), arguing therefrom the essential inferiority of the Son. In like manner, the ancient rabbis took the words of the Seventh Commandment at their face value only, failing to enter into the full spiritual meaning of them. Let premillennialists heed this warning against a slavish literalism or being deceived by the mere *sound* of words, instead of ascertaining their *sense*.

The great Teacher of the Church here supplied us with an invaluable canon of exegesis or rule of interpretation by teaching us that God’s commandment “is exceeding broad” (Psa. 119:96), and that human language becomes invested with a far fuller and richer meaning when used by God than it does on the lips of men. This of itself should be sufficient to silence those who condemn the servants of God when they spiritualize Old Testament prophecies, objecting that they are reading into those prophecies what is not there, and unwarrantably departing from their plain sense. When the Lord Jesus affirmed, “But I say unto you, That whoso looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart,”—had not the Pharisees as much occasion to demur, and say “The Seventh Commandment says nothing about lustful *looks*; You are reading into it what is not there.”

Ere passing on, a few words need to be said on the special heinousness of this particular crime. Adultery is the breach of wedlock. Even the Pharisees condemned it, for though they made light of disobedience to parents (Matt. 15:4-6), yet they clamoured for the death of the woman guilty of this sin of adultery (John 8:4, 5). The grievousness of this offense appears in that it breaks the solemn covenant entered into between husband and wife and God, it robs another of the precious ornament of chastity, it defiles the body and ruins the soul, it brings down the vengeance of God upon the posterity, which Job called “a fire that consumeth to destruction” (31:12). “Be not deceived; neither fornication,

tors, nor idolaters, nor adulterers . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Here we have an exposition of the Seventh Commandment by the supreme Prophet of God, wherein He reveals the height, depth, and breadth of the spirituality of the Divine Law. That commandment not only forbids all acts of uncleanness, but also the desire of them. The Pharisees made it extend no further than to the outward and physical act, supposing that if the iniquity were restricted to the mind, God would be indifferent. Yet their own Scriptures declared, "If I regard iniquity *in my heart*, the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18), and Christ here made it known that if a man allows himself to gaze upon a woman till his appetites are excited and sexual thoughts are engendered, then the Holy Law of God judges him to be guilty of adultery and subject to its curse; and if he indulges his licentious imagination so as to devise means for the gratification thereof, then is his guilt that much greater, even though Providence thwart the execution of his plans.

Our Lord here declared that the Seventh Commandment is broken even by a secret though unexpressed desire. There is, then, such a thing as *heart adultery*—alas that this is so rarely made conscience of today. Impure thoughts and wanton imaginations which never issue in the culminating act, are breaches of the Divine Law. All lusting after the forbidden object is condemned. Where the lascivious desire is rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel, it is the commission of the act so far as the heart is concerned, for there is then lacking nothing but a convenient opportunity for the crime itself. He who weighs the spirits, judges the going out of the heart after that which is evil, as sin, so they who cherish irregular desires are transgressors of the law of purity.

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." It is not an involuntary glance which constitutes the sin, but when evil thoughts are thereby prompted by our depraved natures. The first step and degree, then, of this crime is when lust stirs within us. The second stage and degree is when we deliberately *approach unto*—a feeding of the eye with the sight of the forbidden fruit, where further satisfaction cannot be obtained. Then if this lust be not sternly mortified, the heart swiftly becomes enthralled and the soul is brought into complete bondage to Satan, so that it is fettered by chains which no human power can break. Such was the deplorable condition of those mentioned by the Apostle, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin" (2 Peter 2:14).

Well did Matthew Henry point out, "The eye is both the inlet and the outlet of a great deal of wickedness of this kind: witness Joseph's mistress (Gen. 39:7), Samson (Judges 16:1), David (2 Sam. 11:2). What need have we, therefore, with holy Job, to 'make a covenant with our eyes' (31:1) to make this bargain with them: that they should have the pleasure of beholding the light of the sun and the works of God, provided that they would never fasten or dwell upon anything that might occasion impure imaginations or desires; and under this penalty, that if they did, they must smart for it in penitential tears. What have we the covering of our eyes for, but to restrain corrupt glances and to keep out defiling impressions?" How much sorrow and humiliation would be avoided if such wholesome counsel was duly laid to heart and carried out into practice!?

By clear and necessary implication Christ here also forbade the using of any other of our senses and members to stir up lust. If ensnaring looks be reprehensible, then so much

more unclean conversation and wanton dalliances, which are the fuel of this hellish fire. Again, if lustful looking be so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after—as Jezebel, who painted her face, tired her head, and looked out of the window (2 Kings 9:30)—are not less, but even more guilty. In this matter it is only too often the case that men sin, but women tempt them so to do. How great, then, must be the guilt of the great majority of the modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men? And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses?

As looking to lust is here forbidden, so by proportion are all other like occasions unto adultery. The reading of books which make light of immodesty and indecency, and that cater to those who relish the suggestive and questionable, are therefore prohibited. So too is the use of light and wanton talk and the jesting about loose morals: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting” (Eph. 5:3, 4). Many who are given to this think it a trifling matter, but in reality they are double offenders, for not only have they a wanton eye but a lascivious tongue also. In like manner, promiscuous dancing and mixed bathing is most certainly condemned by the Seventh Commandment, for in both there is additional provocation unto lust.

How solemnly do these words of Christ in Matthew 5:28 condemn us, for even though (by preserving grace) our bodies have not been defiled by the outward act of adultery, yet who can say, “My *heart is clean*”? Who is free from a wanton eye, from evil desires, from impure imaginations? Who can truthfully affirm that he has never been guilty of questionable jesting and unchaste conversation? Must we not all of us lay our hands upon our mouths and condemn ourselves as offenders in the sight of God? Surely we have ample cause to humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand and acknowledge our breach of the Seventh Commandment. And if our repentance and confession be sincere, shall we not be doubly on our guard against a repetition of these sins, seeking to avoid temptations and taking heed of every occasion which may incite us? Surely it is evident that if our hearts be honest before God we cannot do less. Yea, shall we not with increased earnestness pray, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken Thou me in Thy way” (Psa. 119:37)?

Again—if the lust of the heart be adultery in the sight of God, then with what diligence and care should we respond to that injunction, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse* ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1), that is, labour to keep our hearts and minds as pure as our bodies. Unless they do so, Christians themselves will be deprived of a comforting assurance of their personal interest in the love of God, for when they defile their minds by harbouring impure thoughts, the Spirit is grieved, and withdraws His witness to our sonship. Nay, if we truly realize that the Holy One has taken up His abode within our hearts, must we not put forth every effort to keep the Guest chamber clean? As the best way to keep down weeds is to plant the garden with vegetables and flowers, so the most effective means of excluding from the mind those foul imaginations is for it to be filled with thoughts of spiritual things, to have our affections set upon things above. If we give God His proper place within, Satan will be defeated.

We feel that we cannot do better in closing this article than by quoting here the salutary counsels of another: "To temptations to impurity in some of its forms, we are commonly exposed, and it requires constant vigilance to avoid falling before some of them. There are a few suggestions which, on this subject, I would affectionately urge on the attention of the young. Be on your guard against loose and unprincipled companions. 'Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners.' It is impossible to associate intimately with the profligate without danger. Abstain from the perusal of books tainted with impurity. These are scarcely less mischievous—in many cases they are more so—than the company of the wicked."

"The deliberate perusal of such books is a plain proof that the mind and conscience are already in a deeply polluted state. Keep at a distance from all indelicate and even doubtful amusements—I allude chiefly to theatrical amusements—where the mind is exposed, in many instances, to all the evils at once of depraved society and licentious writing. Seek to have your mind occupied and your affections engaged with 'things unseen and eternal.' Habitually realize the intimate presence of that God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Never forget that His eye is on your heart, and that 'all things are naked and opened' to Him; and, as one of the best and most effectual methods of mortifying your members which are on the earth—crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts—"seek the things which are at God's right hand." Never tamper with temptations, but flee youthful lusts" (J. Brown).—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF DAVID.

91. *His Wise Decision.*

It will be remembered that in the last two articles upon The Life of David we chose for their title "His Final Folly," but here we are to be occupied with his wise decision. What a strange mingling there is in the life of the believer of these two things—clearly exemplified in the recorded history of both Old and New Testament saints. This it is which often makes the experiences of a Christian to be so perplexing to him; yet the explanation thereof is not difficult to determine. There are two opposing principles operating within him; the "flesh" and the "spirit," and if one be essentially evil, it is the cause of all his folly; while if the other be intrinsically holy, it is the spring of all true wisdom. Hence it is that in the Scriptures (outstandingly so throughout the book of Proverbs) sin and folly are synonymous terms, while holiness and wisdom are used interchangeably.

It is only by an unsparing and ceaseless judging of ourselves and by the maintenance of close and constant fellowship with God, that indwelling sin can be suppressed and ourselves preserved from deeds of madness. When communion with the Holy One is broken, we have forsaken the Fountain of Wisdom, and then we are left to follow a course from which even the "common sense" of the worldling frequently deters him. We have seen this most solemnly illustrated in the case of David. First, he had allowed his heart to be lifted up over the strengthening and extension of his kingdom and by the great successes which had attended his arms. This led to the folly of his causing a needless military census to be taken of his subjects, without any Divine authorization. Worse still, he persisted in this mad course against the express remonstrance of his officers. And worst of all, he failed to meet the requirements of Exodus 30:12 and provide the necessary ransom.

Painful as it is to dwell upon the failures of so eminent a servant of God, yet the same will prove beneficial to us if we duly take to heart such a solemn warning, and learn therefrom to walk more softly before God. The same evil tendencies lie within both the writer and reader, and it is only as we are truly humbled by such a realization and are moved to deeper self-distrust and self-loathing, and only as we are led to more earnestly and definitely seek God's subduing and preserving grace, that we shall ourselves be kept from falling into similar evils. These Old Testament histories are not merely given for information, but for our edification, and growth is possible only by feeding on God's Word. Feeding on the Word means that we appropriate and masticate it; taking it unto ourselves and assimilating the same.

But alas, David fell; and so have we. Who amongst us dares to say that he has never followed a course of folly since he became a Christian? That he has never been guilty of God-dishonouring acts of madness? But as we are now to see, David recovered his sanity, and once more acted wisely. It was what lay *between* these two things which we would again call attention to, for it is at this very point that most important and precious practical instruction is furnished us. Surely those Christians who have entered the paths of folly desire to tread once more the ways of wisdom. Does it not behoove us, then, to attend closely unto our present narrative and observe the several steps by which the one path is left and the other path returned unto? How gracious of the Holy Spirit in here revealing to us the way of recovery and the means of restoration.

And what, my reader, do you suppose is the *first* step which leads us back into communion with God? What is the particular exercise which recovers us from the disease of

folly? If you have any acquaintance with Divine things the answer will promptly be forthcoming, for the history of your own experience will prompt it. "And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people" (2 Sam. 24:10). We have previously commented upon this verse, so our remarks thereon must be brief. Yet once more we would point out what a mercy it is when an erring saint finds his heart reproving him for his madness and weighed down with a sense of guilt, for this is both a mark of regeneration and a sign that the Lord has not abandoned him—given him up to total hardness and blindness. But it is as intimating the first step in David's recovery that we would now particularly consider the verse.

"And David's heart smote him." This is basic and indispensable. There can be no real restoration to communion with a holy God *until* we unsparingly condemn ourselves for the lapse. That thing which broke the communion must be judged by us. God never forgives, either sinner or saint, where there is no repentance—and one essential ingredient in repentance is *self-judgment*. "If My people which are called by My name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). The first thing, then, is the humbling of ourselves, and that is what repentance is; it is the taking of sides with God against ourselves and sorrowing over our wickedness. Thus it is the tears of contrition which cleanse the eyes of our hearts from the grit of folly, and enable them once more to look on things with the vision of prudence.

And what, dear reader, do you suppose is the *next* step in the return to the ways of wisdom? And again the answer is very simple; where there is a true and honest judging of self, there will also be an humble and contrite owning of the fault to God. Consequently we find in the passage quoted above (2 Chron. 7:14) that immediately after, If My people "shall humble themselves" is, "and pray and seek My face." This is exactly what we find poor David did: "And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now, I beseech Thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly" (2 Sam. 24:10). He made an honest confession of his transgression, emphasizing the greatness of his folly. And this is what every backslider must do before he can be recovered from his madness and restored to fellowship with the Lord.

It is to be observed that coupled with David's confession of sin to the Lord was his request, "take away the iniquity of Thy servant." By that petition at least three things were denoted. First, remit the guilt of the same, both from before Your accusing Law and the weight of the same upon my conscience. Second, cleanse the defilement thereof, both from before Your holy sight and in my polluted soul. Third, cancel or annul the governmental consequences of my crime, so that I may not be punished for it. We need to be clear upon these distinctions, for they are something more than mere technicalities. Now where the holy requirements of God have been duly met and He is pleased to bestow a pardon, the first two of these elements are always included—guilt is blotted out and defilement is cleansed. But the *third* by no means is always obtained.

God ever reserves to Himself the sovereign right to mete out the governmental consequences of our sins as best subserves His glory and the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. So far as the believer himself is concerned, those consequences are not penal but disciplinary, visited upon him not in wrath but in love. Yet it must not be forgotten that wider interests are involved than our own personal ones. Were God to remit all the con-

sequences of sin every time a believer committed a flagrant offense and then sincerely repented of and confessed the same, what impression would be received by men in general? Would not the ungodly draw the conclusion that the Lord regarded transgressions as trifles and is indifferent to our conduct? Thus it is that as the moral Ruler of this world, God often gives solemn tokens of His disapproval of our sins by making us suffer some very painful effects of them in this life.

Yet it would be a great mistake for an afflicted saint to draw the inference from what has just been said that such tokens in his present life of God's displeasure are so many evidences that the sins he has penitently confessed are still unpardonable. A striking case in point occurs in the earlier life of David himself. After he had transgressed so grievously in the matter of Uriah's wife, the Prophet was sent to charge him with his crime. Whereupon David acknowledged, "I have sinned against the LORD," and none who have read seriously the 51st Psalm can doubt either the sincerity or the depth of his repentance. Accordingly Nathan told him, "the LORD also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." Yet he at once added, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:14).

A much more common example is met with in the case of those who in their unregenerate days lived reckless and profligate lives. Upon their conversion God graciously remits the guilt of their sins, canceling the penal consequences of the same so far as eternity is concerned, as He also cleanses them from all the defilements thereof. But it is rare indeed that a debauchee is given back again the health and strength which he had squandered in riotous living; rather is he (in the vast majority of cases, at least) left to now reap in his body the wild oats sown in his mad youth. So it was with David in the matter of his awful crime against Uriah; the "sword" of God's displeasure was not sheathed, but was used against him and his household during the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage.

In the instance now before us, the Prophet Gad was sent unto David to say unto him, "Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three day's pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me" (2 Sam. 24:12, 13). It must be borne in mind (as we pointed out more than once in our articles on the earlier verses of this chapter) that the Lord had a grievance against *Israel*, and therefore His governmental displeasure could not be averted by David's prayer. Divine judgment must fall upon the Nation which had so grievously provoked the Lord, but the form in which it was to come lay with David to choose, though within the prescribed limits.

"And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait; let us now fall into the hand of the LORD" (v. 14). David was now made to taste the bitterness of his sin, yet it is most blessed to see that he neither hardened his heart nor murmured against God when he heard the terrifying message of the Prophet. His beautiful response clearly evidenced the genuineness of his repentance and the sincerity of his confession. This is another point in our narrative which we do well to heed, for alas, our hearts frequently deceive us therein. How often have we mourned over our iniquities and acknowledged them unto the Lord, and then have fretted and fumed when made to feel the governmental consequences of

the same—thereby manifesting the superficiality of our repentance and the dishonesty of our confession.

As we have said in a previous paragraph, genuine repentance is a taking sides with God against ourselves. It is not only the unsparing condemnation of ourselves and a sorrowing for having displeased the Lord, but it is also a heart-felt acknowledgment that we richly deserve to receive the due reward of our iniquities. It is the recognition and acknowledgment that God will be righteous in making us suffer severely under His chastening hand. But it is the sequel which will show how genuine or else how disingenuous is our confession; it is how we carry ourselves under the rod itself—whether meekly or rebelliously—that evidences the reality and depth of our self-judgment. Let us not forget that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God” (Exo. 10:16), yet as soon as the plagues of Jehovah returned to his land, he again hardened his heart.

His heavenly Father must correct David himself, yet He graciously permitted him to determine whether it should be a long protracted or a very brief, yet terribly severe, one. “Years of famine he and Israel had recently experienced. For three years had that scourge prevailed. What misery would seven years of it inflict on them all? During this period a Sabbatical year would fall, throughout which the land must rest, and the Nation would have to pass through it without the gracious provision of the sixth year’s prolific crop. Seven years’ famine would have been a heavy infliction indeed, as the history of such a scourge in the days of Joseph had made plain. Flight before his enemies was not an unknown trial to David. He had experienced years of harassment at the hands of Saul, and had fled from Absalom. Those trials, we may be sure, were not forgotten, though they were ended; and they must have taught him of what men were capable, if allowed by God to pursue him” (C. E. Stuart).

In the previous article we quoted from Matthew Henry, who pointed out that the Lord had a fourfold design in presenting unto David the choice of what particular form His judgment should take—first, to humble David for his sin, which he would see to be exceedingly sinful, when he discovered what dreadful judgment it entailed. Second, to upbraid him for his pride; he had acted in self-will, deeming himself so great a monarch that he could do as he pleased—now he is bidden to exercise his choice in selecting from these dread alternatives. Third, to grant him some encouragement under the chastisement; so far from the Lord having totally deserted his servant, *he* is granted the power to decide what He should do. Fourth, that he might more patiently endure the rod, seeing it was one of his own choosing. To these we would add, fifth, to try out his heart and give opportunity for the exercise and exhibition of his *faith*.

“Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Sam. 24:14). What proof was this that David had recovered his sanity. The wise decision which he now made clearly demonstrated his recovery from the paths of folly and his return to the ways of prudence. And how this illustrates once more the blessed fact that God ever honours those who honour Him. And let it be clearly grasped by us all, that we *do* honour God when we humble ourselves before Him and penitently confess our sins. And one of the ways in which He honours us in return is to grant us a renewed power of spiritual discernment, by which our hearts are drawn out to Him in warmer love and assurance, and by which we obtain a fuller realization of the

greatness of His mercies. How much we miss, dear reader, by refusing to judge ourselves and take our place in the dust before the Throne of Grace!

How wondrous are the ways of Jehovah. He had not only dealt with David's conscience, but He now drew out unto Himself the affections of his heart! He not only brought him to repentance, but He called forth the faith of His beloved servant—the order of which is ever the same. There must be repentance before there can be faith (Mark 1:15; Matt. 21:32), for it is impossible for an hard and impenitent heart to truly trust in the Lord. Thus we may learn that it is impenitency for our sins which lies at the root of our wicked unbelief. But after David *had* repented, the Lord (as we have said above), granted him the opportunity to display his faith. And what a grand exhibition of it he now gave. What acquaintance with and confidence in the Divine character do these words breathe, "Let us fall now into the hand of the LORD"!

Ah, my reader, even when the Lord is sorely chastening us for our faults, He is infinitely more gracious, more faithful, more deserving of our trust than is any creature. "And let me not fall into the hand of man." Poor David had had abundant experience of what man was capable of. His own brethren had been jealous of and had cruelly slandered him (1 Sam. 17:28). Saul had evilly requited him for his kindness. Ahitophel had basely deceived him and betrayed his trust. His beloved son had risen up in rebellion against him and almost succeeded in dethroning him. Good reason, then, had he to say, "Let me not fall into the hand of man": unstable, treacherous, cruel man. And so says this writer after 30 years of Christian experience: "Let me not fall into the hand of man"—least of all religious man. No, let us rather "fall into the hand of the Lord, for HIS mercies are great."—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

9. *Its Perception.*

“The sole way of God’s appointment whereby we may come to an apprehension of an interest in election is by the fruits of it *in our own souls*. Nor is it lawful for us to enquire into it or after it in any other way.” With those words of the judicious Owen we are in full accord. For our part, we would not dare to place any reliance of an everlasting hope upon any dream or vision we had received, or any voice we had heard. Even if a celestial being appeared before us and declared that he had seen our name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, we should place no credence in it, for we would have no means of knowing that it might not be Satan himself, “transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), come to deceive us. Our election must be certified to us by the unerring Word of God, and there only do we have a sure foundation on which to rest our faith.

The obligation which the Gospel puts upon us to believe anything, respects *the order* of the things themselves and the order of our obedience. When it is declared by the Gospel that Christ died for sinners, I am not immediately required to believe that Christ died for me in particular—that were to *invert* the Divine order of the Gospel. The grand and simple message of the Evangel of God’s grace is that Christ Jesus came into the world to procure a way of salvation for them that are lost, that He died for the ungodly, that He so perfectly satisfied the claims of Divine justice that God can righteously justify every sinner who truly believes in His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26). Consequently since I find myself a member of that class, since I know myself to be a sinner, an ungodly person, lost, then I have full warrant to believe the good news of the Gospel. Thus the Gospel requires from me faith and obedience and I am under obligation to render them totally.

Until I believe and obey the Gospel I am under no obligation to believe that Christ died for me in particular; but having done so, I *am* warranted to enjoy that assurance. In like manner, I am required to believe the *doctrine* of election upon my first hearing of the Gospel, because it is therein clearly declared. But as for my own *personal* election I cannot scripturally believe it, nor am I obligated to believe it, but as God reveals it *by its effects*. No man may justly disbelieve in or deny his election until he is in a condition where it is impossible for the effects of election to be wrought in him. While he is un-holy, a man can have no evidence that he is elect—nor can he have any that he is *not* elect, while it is possible for him to be made holy. Thus, whether men are elect or not, is not that which God calls any immediately to be conversant about: faith, obedience, holiness are what are first *required* from us.

Before proceeding further let it be pointed out that the elect are usually to be found where the ministers of Christ labour much. Said Paul, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that *they* may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). That illustrates the principle: the Apostle knew that in his evangelical labours he was being employed in executing God’s purpose in carrying the message of salvation to His people. To that very end was the Apostle sustained by Divine providence and directed by the Spirit of the Lord. Take a brief specimen of the method in which he was Divinely guided. In his second journey publishing the glad tidings in heathen lands, Paul had been led through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and would have preached the Word in Asia, but was “forbidden of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 16:6)—for what possible reason? but that God had none of His elect there, or if any, that the time had not yet arrived for their spiritual deliverance.

The Apostle then assayed to go into Bithynia, but again we are told, “the Spirit suffered hint not” (Acts 16:7). Very striking indeed is that, though it seems to make little or no impression upon people today. Next we read, “And they passing by Mysia (how solemn!) came down to Troas.” There the Lord appeared unto him in a vision directing him to go to Macedonia, and from this he assuredly gathered that He had called him to preach the Gospel there. He thereupon entered that country and proclaimed the Good News, and in consequence, God’s elect in Thessalonica obtained salvation. Later, he came to Corinth, where he met with much opposition, and with little success. He seems to have been on the point of departing, when the Lord appeared to him, strengthened his heart, and assured him, “I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10). As the result, he remained there 18 months and the Corinthian Church was formed.

This grand principle of the Lord’s so directing His servants that His elect are caused to hear His Gospel from their lips, receives many striking illustrations in the Scriptures. The remarkable way in which Philip was conducted with the Word of salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch, and Peter with the same word to Cornelius and his company, are cases in point. Another example, perhaps more striking still, is the way in which the Apostles obtained access to the Philippian jailer with the Word of Life, who, because of his calling, probably found it impossible to hear their public preaching. Most blessedly do these instances exemplify the words of the Saviour who, when referring to that company which the Father had given Him in Gentile lands, declared “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice” (John 10:16)—hear *His* voice through His servants and be quickened by the power of His Spirit.

The Lord Jesus never sends His servants to labour where He has not a people, which being given to Him by the Father, are by Him to be brought into the fold. And He never will so send them. But where He has a people, He will there direct His own servants to call that people to Himself, and they like Paul of old will “endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.” Only the Day to come will fully reveal how much—by His upholding grace—they endured so that the elect might be saved. The elect, then, are to be found where the faithful ministers of Christ labour much. Now, my reader, if you are privileged to live in such a place, then in your own midst you may look for the favoured people of God. The day of golden opportunity is now yours, and it is your bounden duty to respond and yield to the call made by Christ’s servants.

Let us now pass onto something yet more specific. God not only sends His servants to those places where His providence has situated some of His elect, but He clothes His Word with power and makes their labours effective. “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:4, 5). That passage is very much to the point, and each clause in it calls for our closest attention. It tells us *how* the Apostle became assured that the Thessalonian saints were amongst God’s chosen people, and *how*, by parity of reason, they, too, might know and rejoice in their election. Those details have been placed on record for our instruction, and if the Lord is pleased to grant us a spiritual understanding of them, we shall be on safe and sure ground. But in order for this, we must prayerfully ponder these verses word by word.

“Knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God.” How did the Apostle know their election of God? Let it be most particularly observed that this assurance of his was ob-

tained *not* by any immediate revelation from Heaven, not by a supernatural vision or angelic message, nor by the Lord Himself, directly informing him to that effect. No—rather was it by what he had witnessed in and from *them*. It was by the *visible fruits* of their election that he perceived them to be “brethren, beloved.” In other words, he traced back those effects of grace which had been wrought in them at their conversion, to the source thereof in God’s eternal purpose of mercy. Those tiny rivulets of grace in their hearts the Apostle traced back to the ocean of God’s everlasting love from which they proceeded. Therein, he indicated to us the course which we must follow, the method we are to pursue in order to ascertain our predestination to Glory.

“For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power.” All who pretend to preach the Gospel do not actually do so. To allow that they did would be to grant that there are as many different gospels as there are sects and sentiments in Christendom, all claiming theirs to be the true Gospel to the exclusion of every other. It is, therefore, a matter of the very highest importance that each of us should know what the Gospel of Christ really is, and this must be learned from the Holy Scriptures, under the guidance of God the Spirit. There are numerous counterfeits of it in the world today, and their fraud can only be discovered by weighing them in “the balances of the Sanctuary.” Equally necessary and important is it that we ascertain how the Gospel should be *received* by us if the soul is to be permanently benefited by it—or according to the Apostle there is a two-fold reception thereof.

“For our Gospel came not unto you in word only.” For the Gospel to come to us “in word only” is for God to leave it to its natural efficacy, or the force of its arguments and persuasion on the human mind. Multitudes, in many places have heard the Gospel, yet continue in idolatry and in iniquity, notwithstanding the profession which many of them make. When the Gospel comes to us “in word only” it reaches the intellect and understanding, but makes no real impression on the conscience and heart. Consequently, it produces only a feigned and presumptuous faith, a faith which is inferior even to that which the demons have, for they “believe and tremble” (James 2:19). It is only when the Gospel comes to us “in power and in the Holy Spirit” is it received with a true and saving faith. How necessary it is then, to test ourselves at this point.

There are two extremes into which men fall through lack of the right receiving of God’s Word. The one supposes he is possessed of both will and power to perform works of righteousness sufficient to commend him to the favour of God, and so he becomes “zealously affected, but not well” (Gal. 4:17). He fasts, prays, gives alms, attends church, etc., and wherein he thinks he fails or comes short, he calls in the merits of Christ as a crutch for his deficiency. This is but taking a piece of new cloth (Christ’s Atonement) and patching into his garment of legal righteousness, hoping thereby to appease a guilty conscience. He continues his religious performances the year round, but never attains to a vital and experimental knowledge of the Gospel. All his service is but dead works.

The other extreme is the very reverse of this, but equally dangerous. Instead of toiling to the point of weariness, these work not at all. Being conscious more or less, as all natural men are, that they are sinners, and hearing of free salvation by Jesus Christ, they readily fall in with it, receiving it in their minds but not in their consciences. A superficial and presumptuous faith is begotten, and by a single leap they arrive at a supposed assurance of Heaven. But, says Solomon, “An inheritance may be gotten *hastily at the beginning*; but the end thereof shall not be blessed” (Prov. 20:21). These people are great talkers,

boast much of their freedom from the law, but are themselves the slaves of sin. They are ever learning, yet never able to come to a knowledge of the Truth. They laugh at those who have doubts and fears, yet they themselves have the most cause of all to fear.

Now in marked contrast from both of these classes, are they who receive the Gospel not in word only, "but in power and in the Holy Spirit." This is a middle way between these two extremes, and one that is hidden from all unregenerate, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*" (1 Cor. 2:14). When God begins "the work of faith with power" (2 Thess. 1:11), and leads that soul in this middle way, he can at first neither see nor understand it. As it was with the father of all who believe, so it is with all his children: when Abraham was effectually called, he "went out, *not knowing* whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). Those born of the Spirit are led forth by "a way that they know not" (Isa. 42:16), and until darkness is made light before them and crooked things straight, they cannot understand the way of the Spirit; but when that is done, then the highway is "cast up" for them (Isa. 62:10).

The all-important question, then, is, Has the Gospel come to me in word only, or in saving power? If the former, then it has been received *without* anguish, trouble, or distress of conscience, for those are the common marks of Divine power working in the sinner's soul. When God's Word comes to us "in power," it comes as a "two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12), having the same effect on the heart as a sword does when it is thrust into the body. If the wound be deep, the pain and smart will be very acute. So when the Word of God "pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" it produces real anguish and deep distress. Said Job, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit (explained in the next words); the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me" (6:4). And thus, too, David exclaimed, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presses me sore" (Psa. 38:2).

It was thus in the experience of Paul. Before the Spirit applied the Law to his heart, he was alive in his own eyes, though dead in God's; but when the commandment came home to him in Divine power, sin revived and he died—in his own esteem (Rom. 7:9). The fact is that he, like every other Pharisee, supposed that the Law reached no further than the external letter. But when its high demands and searching spirituality were made known to him, he found it reached the very thoughts and intents of the heart, and discovered to him the awful depths of depravity in him which were hid before. He found the Law was *spiritual*, but himself carnal, sold under sin. He found—as very, very few do—that his heart was in the very state described by Christ in Mark 7:21, 22. He was compelled to believe what Christ there declared, because he now saw and felt the same within himself.

The first act of faith brings a man to believe that he is in the very state Scripture declares him to be; at enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3), under the curse of a broken law (Gal. 3:10), led captive by the Devil (2 Tim. 2:26). A heavy burden of sin lies on his conscience (Psa. 38:4), an active fountain of iniquity like the troubled sea casts up its mire and dirt (Isa. 57:20), which baffles all the efforts of an arm of flesh, bringing him into terrible bondage: "our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6). He finds himself bound hand and foot with the cords of his sins, and he cries earnestly to God to take pity upon him, and out of His great mercy loose him. He now

needs no set forms of prayer, but night and day he cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

And *how* does the Lord set him at liberty? By the Gospel coming to him "in power and in the Holy Spirit." God exhibits to him in a new light, the sufferings and death of His Son, by whom His justice was satisfied, His law magnified, His wrath appeased, and a way of reconciliation opened between God and sinners. It is the Spirit's office to work faith in the heart and to apply the atoning blood and righteousness of Christ to the conscience, by whom the burden of sin and death is removed, the love of God is made known, peace is imparted to the soul, and joy to the heart. Thus, the same instrument which wounded, brings healing. Therefore did the Apostle here add, "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, *and in much assurance*"—assurance of its Divine verity and authority, of its perfect adaptability and suitability to our case, of its ineffable blessedness.

"I remember, too, when the Truth came home to my heart, and made me leap for very joy, for it took all my load away; it showed me Christ's power to save. I had known the Truth before, but now *I felt* it. I went to Jesus just as I was, I touched the hem of His garment; I was made whole. I found now that the Word was not a fiction—that it was the one reality. I had listened scores of times, and he that spake was as one that played a tune upon an instrument; but now he seemed to be dealing with me, putting his hand right into my heart. He brought me first to God's Judgment Seat, and there I stood and heard the thunders roll; then he brought me to the Mercy-seat, and I saw the blood sprinkled on it, and I went home triumphing because sin was washed away" (C. H. Spurgeon).—A.W.P.

THE HOLY SABBATH.

6. *Its Perpetuation.*

Continuing at the point where we left off last month, let the reader ponder carefully the following questions. Does a weekly return of a day, separated from ordinary employment and consecrated to the immediate service and worship of God, seem to run contrary to the evident scope and tendency of the Gospel, or rather to harmonize with it? Does it tend to promote or hinder the end which Christianity has avowedly in view? Is it relished or disrelished by those who have drunk most deeply into the spirit of the Gospel? And when it is allowed, more or less, from whatever cause, to fall into neglect, does the cause of Christ appear to gain or to lose in consequence? These are very important and most pertinent inquiries, and are not to be summarily dismissed by a prejudiced shrug or sneer.

It is neither fair nor fitting that such questions as the above should be disposed of by a general and unsupported objection that such an ordinance as the Sabbath is not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel. We ask, in what respect is it not in accord? Does it beget a temper which the lessons of the Gospel are meant to subdue, or to check the growth of feelings which it calls us to cherish and manifest? If this *were* the case, it would go far to prove the unsoundness of any defense which might rather be raised for the Sabbath in this dispensation. But is it so? Wherein lies the supposed contrariety between the design and spirit of Christianity and the strict observance of a weekly Sabbath? To reply that the one promotes freedom while the other makes for bondage, is to confound liberty and license and is to mistake necessary restraint for serfdom.

It is almost universally acknowledged in Christendom that the Gospel, considered in its lowest aspect, is pre-eminently a scheme of benevolence, and that it looks with a kindly and friendly countenance on the condition of those who most stand in need of sympathy and care. But we ask, is not a weekly Sabbath, withdrawn from worldly employments, bringing to the very busiest the liberty, at least, of relaxing their bodies and refreshing their spirits, one of the highest boons that can possibly be conferred on the poor? Certainly God Himself claimed it as one of His special acts of kindness toward Israel that He gave to them the privilege of knowing and keeping such a day. Are, then, the artisans of this materialistic, strenuous, and avaricious age, in less need of such a merciful furlough from their weekly toil? Then has the Gospel less concern for man's temporal well-being than had the Law?

But the Gospel has another, a higher, a far more prominent and peculiar characteristic than this, namely, its *spiritual* and *holy* tendency being pre-eminently designed to beget those who embrace it to a pure and heavenly life. In this respect it not only equals, but far surpasses Judaism. True it is, blessedly true, that the Gospel is not so much a revelation of law as of grace, nevertheless grace abounds only that believers may proceed to higher exercises of faith and godliness. Every doctrine it reveals, every privilege it confers, is avowedly designed to have its present fruit unto holiness, as well as its final end unto everlasting life. To be conformed unto the pure image of the Son of God, to have our affections set upon things above and not on things of the earth, to glorify God and not gratify self is the character at which the Gospel aims—which all its truths and ordinances are calculated to produce, and without which its great end is practically annulled. Hence the covetous, the lovers of pleasure, the earthly-minded, no less than the grossly impure, are expressly declared to be unfit for a place in the kingdom of God as now constituted.

Now as real Christianity is thus identified with a spiritual and heavenly character on the part of its professors, it is pertinent to ask, What relation has the institution of a weekly Sabbath, dedicated throughout to the worship and service of God, to such an object? Does it tend to promote, or rather to hinder and retard, this high design? The question is not whether men may not strictly adhere to the observance of a proper Sabbath, and yet resort to unhallowed practices on other days of the week, for hypocrisy can counterfeit a regard to this as to any other ordinance of God. No, it is, Is the Sabbath calculated to be a handmaid to the Gospel in producing the purifying effects at which it aims? Does a weekly returning day, divorced from all ordinary labour and devoted to religious exercises, tend to help forward true piety, or to mar and kill so desirable a fruit.

The question when thus directed to its proper object, admits of a speedy answer: not only is a day of holy rest greatly conducive to the end in view, but it is scarcely possible to conceive how, without such a day, the end could, among the bulk of mankind, be accomplished at all. Even under the Mosaic economy, when the standard of spirituality was confessedly lower than it ought to be now, the Sabbath was found necessary for the same purpose, and on this account especially did God set it to be "a sign between Him and His people throughout their generations, that they might know that He was the Lord that sanctified them." How much more, then, is it required now, when His people are called to live so much by the faith of what is spiritual and Divine, and to cultivate that elevated frame of mind and course of life which is indispensable to a close communion with God.

While it is true that the Gospel requires this heavenly mindedness and holy living to be common to every day of the week, and does not allow it to be confined only to one, yet take away the wholesome and hallowing influences of that one, constantly coming round with its sacred exercises, and what is likely to become of the rest? How soon will the bulwarks of piety give way, and the whole spirit and character of Christianity become secularized, if the Sabbath were practically abolished and every day of the week were alike devoted to worldly pastime or business. If the cause of Christ on earth is to prosper, and the great end of the Gospel to be promoted in the souls of men, then assuredly this day of holy rest to the Lord cannot be dispensed with, nor can it be too jealously guarded against the encroachments of worldly occupation, for it is through the sacred leisure and holy exercises of that day men are especially to familiarize themselves with the things of God.

Another way of ascertaining the relation which the Sabbath holds to practical Christianity is to inquire how they who have drunk most deeply into the spirit of the Gospel usually feel toward such a day. If we might entertain any doubt as to the proper connection between a Sabbath and the great ends of the dispensation of grace, we ought surely to have that doubt removed, if we find the general pulse of the saints beating, as it were, in unison on the subject. We would seldom fail to gather aright the bearing of any particular measure on the constitution of a country, if we heard one and the same sentiment expressed regarding it by those who were most conversant about and imbued with the spirit of that constitution. So with the Sabbath. Can any such testimony be produced in its favour? Yes—in every generation of this era, the most pious have espoused and promoted its observance, and that not only in one country, but in every land where the Gospel obtains a footing. Pages might be filled with testimonies from one and another, but we will content ourselves with one only, who lived in the palmy days of Puritanism.

"For my part, I must not only say, but plead whilst I live in this world, and leave this testimony to the present and future ages, that if ever I have seen anything in the ways and worship of God, wherein the power of godliness hath been expressed: anything that hath represented the holiness of the Gospel, and the Author of it; anything that hath looked like it prelude to the everlasting Sabbath and rest with God, which we all through grace to come unto, it hath been there and with them where and amongst whom the Lord's Day hath been had in highest esteem, and a strict observation of it attended unto, as an ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The remembrance of their ministry, their walking and conversation, their faith and love, who in this nation have most zealously pleaded for, and have been in their persons, families, and churches, the most rigid observers of this day, will be precious with them that fear the Lord, whilst the sun and moon endure" (John Owen).

We bring these arguments to a close by pointing out that it adds much to the force and conclusiveness of all that has been advanced above for the necessity of a Sabbath to the life and prosperity of Christianity, that whenever the observance of such a day falls into practical neglect the consequence to the cause of Christ are most disastrous. Ministers of the Gospel, and teachers and guardians of youth have often proclaimed the melancholy result of what they have witnessed in many lands, that neglected or ill-spent Sabbaths infallibly carry in their train declining spirituality and decreasing morality. Chaplains of prisons have in like manner borne witness that the vast majority of offenders brought under their notice have been notorious Sabbath-breakers, and that many of them acknowledge their downward course began with neglecting its holy duties and privileges.

Thus far have we sought to show that the presumption in favour of the Sabbath being perpetuated during this Christian era amounts virtually to a demonstration. We now proceed to prove this presumption grows into *certainty* when we contemplate the personal conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ in connection with it, and ponder some of His declarations. Take first the former: "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day" (Luke 4:16). Thus it is clear that the Saviour honoured this Divine institution. During the quiet years which preceded His public ministry, He had regularly attended the synagogue's services on that day specially set apart for sacred solemnities. It is striking to note that this statement occurs not in Matthew (the most Jewish of the Synoptists), but in Luke, where He is portrayed as the Son of man.

At the beginning of His public ministry, one of Christ's first announcements was, "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). Here the Lord asserted in most unequivocal language, that His mission in this world was not designed in any respect to abolish or relax, but to verify and confirm what had previously been declared by God. The Redeemer accomplished what was required by the Law and the Prophets, first, by personally fulfilling in Himself that righteousness which they demanded; and second, by imposing the same upon His people as the measure of that obedience to which through His grace they were to be ever growing. To have ignored the demands of the Law or the Prophets in either of those respects, would manifestly have been to destroy and not to fulfil them.

Now the force of Christ's solemn assertion in Matthew 5:17 and its pertinence to our present inquiry is at once apparent if we pause to ask this specific question: was the ordinance of the Sabbath equally recognized and enforced in the Law and the Prophets?

Surely the question answers itself. In that solemn and comprehensive revelation of Law which was promulgated from Mount Sinai and which in Scripture is usually denominated "*the Law*," it had a definite, an honourable place, occupying the very center of the Ten Commandments. So, too, in the Prophets: not only when they spoke of Jewish, but also when they referred to Gentile times, there is (as we have shown) a testimony both explicit and authoritative in favour of the Sabbath. Thus, when Christ declared He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets, He can only be fairly understood to mean that He definitely adopted the testimony they delivered concerning the day of Sacred Rest.

"And He said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28). The Sabbath was designed for man's blessing. It was given because he needed it, both in his body and in his soul. It was appointed that he might be *man* in the highest sense of the word—something better than a beast of burden, something nobler than a cash register. Observe the force of, "*Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath*": because the Sabbath is made not merely for Israel, but for man, and because in becoming incarnate the Son of God touched all humanity, as "Son of man" He is "Lord also of the Sabbath." And mark well His relation thereto: He is not the Destroyer of the Sabbath, but its "Lord"; not the Repealer of it, but its Sovereign.

There are a number of passages in the Gospels (like Matt. 12:1, 2, 10) which record the criticisms that the Saviour met with from His enemies regarding His conduct on the Sabbath, and it is most instructive and important to note the different answers He gave in self-vindication. That which is of chief moment for us to observe is that His utterances on these occasions made it unmistakably clear that both works of real necessity and works of mercy on the Sacred day are permissible and lawful. Thus we discover that the words, "in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exo. 20:10) are *not* to be understood *absolutely*, but are to be interpreted in the light of these modifications of Christ. All Sabbath labour which is not imperative for the well-being of man and beast is Divinely forbidden, but whatever be essential for their true good is sanctioned by the Lord's own example.

Though Christ ignored all the rabbinical regulations which had been superimposed upon the Divine Law, He never did one thing or uttered one word which to the slightest degree undermined or relaxed the requirements of the Fourth Commandment. There is evidence that the Sabbath law had been encumbered and perverted by Jewish interpretations and traditions. They permitted a man to fill a trough with water for beasts to come and drink, but forbade him carrying water to them. According to one school it was not allowable to minister unto the sick on the Sabbath. Consequently we find our Lord going to considerable pains to expound the Fourth Commandment, and rescue it from these accretions. It was *not* that Christ modified the exactions of the Divine Law or granted man an indulgence for secularizing the Sacred Day, but that He freed it from the arbitrary injunctions of the Jewish teachers.

In what has just been pointed out, we discover another proof for the continuance of the Sabbath in this dispensation. If the Sabbath had been on the brink of being repealed, why should Christ have been so careful to explain its requirements, and make clear that works of mercy and of necessity were allowable on that day? Read carefully the various vindications which He gave them when attacked on that point, and where is there the slightest hint that He was about to abrogate the Sabbath? So far from it, His defenses, one and all, were simply to the effect that He was delivering it from the errors of the Pharisees, and

thereby He settled a point which would afterwards be of great service to His Church. "Suppose you saw a man taking pains to restore a defaced inscription on a pillar, to remove from it the rubbish which had been heaped around its base, and to tear away the ivy that surrounded its summit, would you not infer it was his intention that its inscription should remain for the information of future ages? Such was the conduct of our Lord in reference to the Sabbath Law" ("The Sabbath Not a Mere Judaical appointment" by Andrew Thomson).

"But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day" (Matt. 24:20). These words were uttered by Christ at the close of His public ministry. "The earliest possible period to which this direction can refer, is the siege of Jerusalem—a period at least 40 years after the ascension of Christ, that is, after the full establishment of the Gospel dispensation, and after 'the Gospel of the kingdom had been preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations' (v. 14 and cf. Col. 1:6). At such an advanced period in the Gospel age, and in a season, too, of unparalleled distress, the disciples were, by the direction of their Lord, to make it a matter of special prayer that they might not need to take their flight on the Sabbath day It is impossible to entertain due respect to Christ as an infallible teacher, without admitting it to be His clear intention in this passage that the weekly Sabbath should continue after the Gospel dispensation was fully set up" (F. Fairbairn, from which much in this article is taken almost *verbatim*).—A.W.P.

WELCOME TIDINGS.

“Serve the LORD *with gladness*” (Psa. 100:2). What a *blessed thing* it is to serve the Lord! His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The service of the Lord is freedom, the only true freedom there is. The service of Satan is “captivity” (2 Tim. 2:26); the service of sin is drudgery, cruel tyranny. The service of man is often unreasonable, unmerciful, unwelcome. But the service of the Lord is true liberty, spiritual, delightful. The Lord is no harsh taskmaster, commanding us to make bricks and providing no straw with which to do so. When He calls, He also equips. He sends not forth His servants at their own charges (1 Cor. 9:7), but freely provides for them. They are not left to act in their own strength, but are held in His right hand (Rev. 1:20). Such a Master is to be served “*with gladness*.”

What a *holy privilege* it is to serve the Lord! It is infinite condescension on His part that He deigns to notice us at all. If the great God, who has the Heaven of heavens for His throne, and the earth as a footstool “humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in Heaven” (Psa. 113:6), how much more so to occupy Himself with worms of the dust. It is an amazing thing that the Lord, who is so ineffably holy, should save such vile wretches as we are, for as unregenerate creatures we appreciated not the kindly ministrations of our faithful Creator, but perverted His mercies. But how wonderful beyond words that He not only saves but also calls us into His service, that the remainder of our days may be spent in seeking to further His interests. Such a gracious Master is to be served “*with gladness*.”

What a *high honour* it is to serve the Lord! He is the One whom sun and moon and all the planets obey. He is the One whom the cherubim and seraphim and all the holy angels delight to submit unto. How grand, then, that we who belong to a lower order of beings should be called to His service. How eagerly politicians aspire after the high offices of an earthly state! What dignity pertains unto one whose vocation is to be a gentleman-in-waiting to a human monarch! But what comparison is there between such things and being made the courtiers of the Celestial Sovereign, to becoming servants of the King of kings? It was the realization of this which caused the Apostle to exclaim, “Whose I am, and whom I serve.” Such a glorious Master is to be served “*with gladness*.”

No matter what be the particular sphere which He has allotted you, my reader, the Lord is to be served with *gladness*. Whether it be in the kitchen or in the workshop, it is to be performed “in singleness of your heart as unto Christ” (Eph. 6:5). No matter how menial or unpleasant the task, “whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). And should He have called you to engage in the ministry of His Word, complain not at the difficulties of the way, but “serve the Lord with gladness.” And why? The Psalm from which our text is taken supplies sufficient answer. First, because the Lord Himself has made us (Psa. 100:3): we should rejoice in the fact that we are His creatures. Second, because “we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture” (v. 3): as the good Shepherd, He gave His life for us—how the apprehension of this sets our hearts a-singing. Third, because, “the Lord is good: His mercy is everlasting” (v. 5): then we have no ground for repining; instead we must “make a joyful noise unto the Lord.” Finally, because “His Truth endureth to all generations” (v. 5). Yes, despite all the ragings of the Enemy, His Word is still intact in our hands, and by it we may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

These lines are being written by us (late in March) when men's hearts are again failing them for fear, when they tell us the political outlook is exceedingly dark, and that another "crisis" is at hand. But the believer should look *above* the restless sea of the nations and the continual clashing and inter turmoil of selfish interests, and beholding the Lord as One who has complete control of the situation, "serve Him with gladness." Suppose the predictions of alarmists *are* fulfilled and the fears of pessimists be actualized, and widespread war burst forth in all its horrors—then what? Why, the exhortation before us still obtains—no change in circumstances can alter the Lord or our blessed relationship to Him. It is in the midst of much that tends to distress and depress that we once more send forth "Welcome Tidings," with the design of contributing to the joy of our readers. As is our custom, we give now some extracts from the many letters received testifying to the gladness of not a few that we are still enabled to send forth this monthly messenger.

"I want to express to you as best I can the pleasure, the edification, the sweetness, the depth, and the spiritual beauty of the articles which have appeared in the 'Studies.' There is such a wholesome refreshment in reading them, and they are new when re-read" (Preacher). "I am still getting much out of 'Studies.' When I get hungry for something I can hardly explain, feel that I need searchings of heart and something to lift up my drooped spirit, something to help me see my sin and weakness and then something to help me out; well, I just sit down and get quiet with 'Studies' and am always well repaid. I thank our dear Lord for the work He has given you to do and pray that it may not cease" (Preacher).

"We found the articles on 'A fourfold salvation' most instructive and helpful, and trust that we, with others, will profit by them. We rejoice you are taking up the subject of the Holy Sabbath, which we feel is very necessary to the present time" (Australia). "I must write and thank you very much for sending me the 'Studies.' I cannot tell you how much they have helped me in my daily life. We hear so little of the true Gospel, and have so little food for our poor souls to feed on. What a mercy no one can take the precious Bible from us, but often a word from the Lord's servants sends us on our way rejoicing" (Australia). "The Studies have removed a mass of ignorant sentiment concerning the nature and character of God Himself, and given me to see Him more clearly as revealed in His Word as a holy God who demands holiness from us, and who cannot tolerate sin in any respect" (Australia).

"I have been wanting to write to you for some time a word of encouragement in the work you are undertaking in sending forth the monthly paper. I can truly say they come each time with fresh light and blessing: not only do I enjoy reading every message, but the different lines of truth expounded have inspired me to search the Scriptures as I have never done before" (Canada). "I thank God for His grace in enabling you to write the articles which the people of God need in these days. The 'Studies' are a table furnished in the wilderness. It would be impossible to say which of your articles I enjoy the most; those on Election are very helpful" (Canada).

"Thank you for so regularly sending me the 'Studies.' I continue to find them most profitable, and am deeply thankful they were ever brought to my notice. The dearth of spiritual Scriptural teaching seems to be increasing apace and alas, the lack of desire for such teaching; but where there is the desire, one cannot but value highly these Studies. I trust that you may still be Divinely strengthened to continue this good work" (Preacher). "The work to which you are committed is no easy one; we can see that by reading the

contents—so different from the husks of modern literature. May the Lord preserve you both in your labour of love for many years to come is our desire; we hope it is likewise the will of the Lord" (Babe in Christ). "Many times during the past year I have thanked God for the messages contained in 'Studies,' and have prayed that the Holy Spirit would apply them in effectual power to my own heart (O how I need them!) and to the hearts of those to whom it has been my privilege to pass on a copy" (Babe in Christ).

"How much we enjoy the 'Studies' and how we look forward to their arrival every two months. Our evening worship is not complete unless we read an article, or at least part of one, with our Bible reading and prayer. We never forget to remember you both in our devotions" (U.S.A.). "Each day as I think of you and remember you at the Throne of Grace I thank our Lord and God for your ministry. I have never found any other so satisfying. I have tried to interest friends in the Magazine, but have often been disappointed" (U.S.A.). "Yesterday my new copies of the 'Studies' arrived: I trust that I received them with gratitude and thanksgiving to God for His blessing upon this ministry, and because He has kept you faithful in the service to which He has called you. Again and again they have revived and strengthened me when so cast down that there seemed no way out. May our blessed Lord direct you to so minister to many others of the 'little flock' which He has purchased with His own blood" (U.S.A.).

"Thank you for the many times your 'Studies' have been a great blessing to me. I trust you may increase in the knowledge of God's Word, that you may continue to feed others" (Preacher). "I have been blessed by reading and studying your articles on 'The Doctrine of Election, and I have been ministering same in the meeting, where some have been roused and others have opposed. I could never have thought it possible that real believers could turn on one so fiercely when speaking on such a God-honouring subject." (Those with longer experience fully *expect* the hottest opposition to this Truth from those making the loudest profession). "For many years now we have had no need to 'go to Church,' such a rich repast having been spread for us in our own home, and I am sure it has not harmed us to sit quietly under a written ministry as the Lord Himself has come forth and served us, and many times have we been conscious of His satisfying presence, saying, 'Eat O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved.' The Lord no doubt has many others hidden away, who are being refreshed by your written ministry. It is good for the Lord's people that they have been compelled to be in retirement from the strife of tongues—compelled for the Truth's sake. There is much scope for fleshly activity in attending meetings. I do not know which of the articles in the 'Studies' we like best: all seem so necessary and useful in their season" (Brother and Sister). "Serve the Lord with gladness."—A.W.P. and V.E.P.

