

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—December, 1941**THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.**

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant; nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s” (Exo. 20:17). That which is here prohibited is concupiscence or an unlawful lusting after what is another man’s. In our exposition of the previous Commandments we have pointed out that while their actual terms are confined to the forbidding of outward acts, yet the scope of each one takes in and reaches unto the condemnation of everything which has any tendency or occasion to lead unto the overt crime. Here in the final precept of the Decalogue we find clear confirmation of the same, for in it God expressly imposes a law upon our spirits, forbidding us to so much as lust after whatever He has forbidden us to perpetrate. The best way to keep men from committing sin in act is to keep them from desiring it in heart. Thus while the authority of each of the first nine Commandments reaches to the mind and the most secret intents of the soul, yet the Lord saw fit to plainly and literally state this in the Tenth, where He specifically reprehends the first motions of our hearts toward any object He has fenced, and therefore it is the bond which strengthens the whole.

Evil concupiscence consists of those secret and internal sins which go before the consent of the will and which are the seeds of all evil. Concupiscence or lusting is the firstborn of indwelling depravity, the first risings and expressions of our corrupt nature. It is a violent propensity and inclination unto what is evil, unto that which is contrary to the holy will and command of God. The soul of man is an operative and vigorous creature, ever putting forth activities suitable to its nature. Before the Fall, the soul of man was drawn forth unto God as its supreme Object and the End of all its exercise, but when man apostatized and turned from God as his only Good or satisfying Portion, his soul became enamoured with the creature. Thus the soul of fallen man being destitute of Divine grace and spiritual life, craves sinful objects to the slighting of God, and inordinately lusts after things which in themselves are harmless, but become evil because he neither receives them as from God nor uses them for His glory. Concupiscence, then, is that irregular disposition of soul which is here termed “covetousness.”

The Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins (to whom we are indebted for much in this article, as also for many helpful points in the preceding ones) has pointed out that there are four degrees of this sinful concupiscence or coveting. There is the first film and shadow of an evil thought, the imperfect embryo of a sin before it is shaped in us or has any lineaments or features. These are what the Scriptures term “every imagination of the thoughts” of our hearts, and they are expressly declared to be “evil” (Gen. 6:5). Such are the first risings of our corrupt nature toward those sins which are pleasing unto our sensual inclinations. They are to be steadfastly watched, hated and resisted—stamped upon as the sparks of a dangerous fire—for as soon as they begin to stir within us they pollute the soul. Just as the breathing upon a mirror sullies it, leaving a dimness there, so the very first breathings of an evil desire or thought within our breasts defiles the soul.

A farther degree of this concupiscence is when these evil motions of our corrupt nature are *entertained* in the mind with some degree of complacency. When a sinful object presents itself before a carnal heart there is an inward response that affects it with delight and begets a sympathy between them. As in natural sympathy a man is often pleased with an object before he knows the reason why he is so, so in this sinful sympathy or response the heart is taken with the object

before it has time to consider what there is in it which so moves and affects it. At the very first sight of a person we many times find that we are more drawn to him than to a whole crowd of others, though all may be equally unknown to us. So the very first glimpse of a sinful thought in our minds reveals that there is that in us which works a regard for the same before we have leisure to examine why it is so. This second form or degree of concupiscence is harder to eject than the former.

If such evil motions are entertained by us then follows *assent* and approbation of the sin in the practical judgment which being blinded and carried away by the strength of corrupt and carnal affections commends the sin to the executive faculty. The understanding is the trier of every deliberate action so that nothing passes into action which has not first passed trial there. Whether this or that action is to be done is the great question canvassed in that court and all the faculties of the soul await what definite sentence will be here pronounced and so passed accordingly. Normally two things appear and put in their plea to the understanding or judgment about sin: God's law and God's vicegerent, the conscience—the law condemns and the conscience cites the law. But then the affections step in and bribe the judge with promises of pleasure or profit, thereby corrupting the judgment to give its vote and assent unto sin. Note how all of this receives illustration in the colloquy between Eve and the Serpent before she partook of the forbidden fruit.

When any sinful motion has thus secured an allowance from the judgment, then it betakes itself to the will for a decree. The understanding having approved it, the will must now resolve to commit it, and then the sin is fully formed within and lacks nothing but opportunity to bring it forth into open act. "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth (open) sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14, 15). Thus we have endeavoured to show what concupiscence or coveting is, and the several degrees of it—the first bubblings up of evil thoughts in our hearts, our delighting in the same (and it is altogether against corrupt nature not to love these firstborn of our own souls), the assent and allowance of our judgment, and the resolution of our wills. Each of these is expressly forbidden by the Tenth Commandment, and if the sin proceeds any further, then it exceeds the bounds of this Commandment and falls under the prohibition of some of the former ones, which more specifically forbid the outward acts of sin.

This final word, then, utters its solemn protest against sin in the inner life. Therein we may behold and adore the boundless dominion or sovereignty of the great God. He proclaims His rights over the hidden realm of desires. His authority reaches to the soul and conscience and lays an obligation upon our very thoughts and imaginations, which no human laws can do. It would be vain for men to impose statutes upon that of which they can take no cognizance, and therefore our desires and lustings are free from their censure, except so far as they discover themselves by overt acts. But though they escape the commands and notice of men, yet they escape not the scrutiny and sentence of God, for He sees not as men see, neither judges He as men judge. The secrets of all hearts are open and naked before His eyes—not the least breath of a desire can stir in our souls but it is more distinctly visible to Him than the shining of the midday sun is to us.

God's Law, like His knowledge, reaches unto the most secret recesses of the soul, searches every corner of the heart, judges those lusts which no human eye can espy, and if they be harboured and approved of, condemns us as a transgressor guilty of eternal death, no matter how

fair our external deportment may be. Then how vain it is for us to content ourselves with an outward conformity to God's Law! How we should labour to approve our hearts in sincerity and purity before God—otherwise we are but Pharisaical hypocrites who wash merely the outside of the cup while within we are still full of unclean lusts. How many there are who suppose God's Law reaches only to the outward man and that though they entertain and cherish wicked desires and evil purposes in their hearts, so long as these break not forth into external crimes they will not be charged to their account. But the Day of judgment will show it is far otherwise. How very few reflect upon *heart* sins! How very few pray, "Cleanse me from secret faults O God"! Be not deceived, God is not mocked, and cannot be imposed upon by external shows.

See here the wisdom of God in setting this Commandment at the close of the Decalogue, as a fence and guard to all the rest. It is from inward defilements of the soul that all the visible sins of our acts and lives have their rise. All Sabbath-breaking proceeds from the restlessness which is born of unholy desire. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries" etc. (Matt. 15:19). Observe well that Christ places "evil thoughts" in the front, as the leader of this vile regiment! "Thou shalt not covet"—you shall not set your heart upon or have the least hankering after what belongs to another. An objector may say: it is impossible to prevent the desire for what we admire. Very true, yet in that fact is revealed the fallen condition of man, the desperate wickedness of his heart, and that such desire is sinful *and damning* is only discovered in the light of this Commandment. He who honestly faces this final word of the Decalogue must be convicted of his sinfulness and brought to realize his helplessness which is its ultimate design: the Law is given to demonstrate that our case is *hopeless* in ourselves—to shut us up to Christ!—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

20. *Judging Others*: Matthew 7:1.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged” (v. 1). Last month we were obliged, so as not to exceed the usual length, to confine ourselves unto the first part of this brief verse. In it we sought to show what is here *not* forbidden is a lawful judging which God requires us to exercise, both in public and in private. Then we pointed out no less than seven forms of *unlawful* judging, indicating that this prohibition of Christ’s is a very comprehensive one. Our apology, if such be needed, for entering into so much detail is, first, because these words “judge not” are so frequently misunderstood and misapplied, and second, because the sin which is here forbidden is a very grievous one and has become exceedingly common. Some Christians are more prone to it than others—one in one way and one in another. It is a sin which may be committed even in the House of Prayer. When the minister is rebuking some evil or failure in some particular duty, there are often those present who will conclude he is addressing himself to some others in the congregation, which is one reason why so many reap so little from hearing the Word preached.

Now since it is wrong for us to judge one of our brethren or even our fellows presumptuously, hypocritically, hastily, unwarrantably, unjustly or unmercifully, how much more heinous must it be for us to give audible expression to the same and transmit it to others! Equally so is it for those who listen to us to repeat the same. “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people” (Lev. 19:16): yet who among us can plead innocence therein! Alas how many there are, now that the pulse of love beats so feebly, who take a devilish pleasure in spreading evil reports of fellow members and enlarging on the same. “A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter” (Prov. 11:13). Equally reprehensible is it for us to censure and hold up to scorn those of another denomination, unless the Scriptures plainly condemn them. “Speak evil of no man” (Titus 3:2) forbids us expressing anything to the discredit or disadvantage of another to anyone but to himself, except where duty demands it—the putting others on their guard against an evil-doer or a doctrinal corrupter.

It should be pointed out that veracity is not the only virtue which needs to be exercised whenever we make report of the character and conduct of another. To say of such and such a person, “He possesses this or that virtue, *but*—well, the less said, the better,” is far worse than saying nothing at all, for such an utterance insinuates to our hearers there is some grave evil in the party to whom we have alluded. We may say nothing but what is the *truth*, yet by the very manner in which we express ourselves suggest that a certain person is not to be trusted. Thus when David came to Abimelech begging bread for his men and requesting some weapon and the priest granted him the sword of Goliath (1 Sam. 21), Doeg, who witnessed the transaction put his knowledge to a wicked use by reporting the same unto Saul, implying that Abimelech had entered into a conspiracy with David against the king’s life; and the telling of the truth from such an evil motive and in such a manner, cost the lives of eighty-five priests (1 Sam. 22:18): again we say, Behold how great a fire a little matter may kindle!

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” After the Commandment there follows *a reason* which is designed to cause us to make conscience of forming and expressing unlawful judgments, or more accurately speaking, the second part of the verse is *a dissuasive*, a warning against the sin forbidden at the beginning of it. But precisely what is the nature of this warning? exactly what did our Lord here have in mind? Nearly all the expositors see in it nothing more than a threat that we

must be prepared for our fellows treating us just as we treat them: that if we asperse people, others will slander us; that if we are harsh and censorious in the estimates we form of our fellows, then we in turn shall receive unkind treatment, being paid back again in like manner. On the other hand, if we are charitable and merciful, ready to think the best and slow to think the worst of any, then others will in turn deal gently and considerately with our reputation. In brief, the words “that ye be not judged” signify, lest you be unlawfully and unfairly judged by men.

Now we do not believe this common interpretation of Christ’s warning gives the full or even the principal force of it, and that for several reasons. First, because the usual sense accorded it is one which has little weight with those who are walking with God. It is true there are many professing Christians who are greatly concerned about what others think and say of them. They are most anxious to shine in others’ eyes—are very jealous of their own reputation and easily hurt if anyone slights them or speaks a word against them—yet all of this has its root in *pride* and self-esteem. But one who is walking with God, who is painfully conscious of the plague of his heart, who in some measure at least sees himself as God sees him, is so thoroughly aware of his awful corruptions, his many inward and outward defects, that he knows quite well the worst men can say against him falls far short of the estimate he has of himself. The one who unsparingly judges himself is unruffled by the criticisms of others.

When one is truly walking with God, his *only* concern is what his Divine Father thinks of him. If he is conscience of all that displeases Him, he daily confesses to Him every known sin and begs him to cleanse him from sins of ignorance and omission. If he is sincerely endeavouring to walk in the path of obedience it will trouble him very little what other worms of the dust think or say about him. He is conscious of the fact that God knows his heart—that if only he has the approbation of the Lord this is worth infinitely more than the highest esteem of all mankind. Said the Apostle Paul, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of *you*” (1 Cor. 4:3). Their opinion mattered nothing, his responsibility was not unto them. “Yea, I judge not mine own self” he added: “Christ is alone my Lord and Judge, to Him I stand or fall.” Blessed liberty is it when we are delivered from being in bondage to the fickle opinions and estimates of man, who will one day cry “hosanna” and the next day “crucify.”

It is not that walking with God produces a spirit of egotism which causes one to have so high a regard of himself that he considers he is outside the range of human judgment—no, far otherwise. Nor will he disdain a correction or admonition when he needs it: rather will he say with David, “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa. 141:5). A truly humbly soul will weigh before God the reproofs of the righteous. “Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Prov. 9:8), for he knows full well that “faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6). “As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise re-prover upon an obedient ear” (Prov. 25:12). Alas, how few with an “obedient ear” are now left! But while welcoming needful reproofs and being thankful for the faithful dealings of those who wish him well, this is vastly different from being the prey of public opinion, fearful of being misunderstood, wondering what one and another will say of us, even while we are doing that which is right.

Second, we find it very difficult to persuade ourselves that when the Lord said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” He had reference to nothing else, nothing more solemn and searching

than, Refrain from passing unlawful judgment upon others lest you meet with the same treatment at the hands of your fellows. Such a warning has little weight with the majority of professors and none at all with those who are walking in the fear of God, for where *His* fear possesses the heart, it is delivered from the fear of man. Furthermore, it seems entirely out of accord with the whole tenor of His Sermon with the searching character of all its details, that He should introduce and make so prominent (note the following verse) what is after all but a secular motive. In a discourse, one chief design of which was to make plain the spirituality of the Christian character in contrast from the worldly character of the Pharisee, Christ would surely employ a weightier dissuasive than the mere fear of suffering from the fickle judgments of fellow mortals!

Third, and what is more decisive, the idea that “judge not, that ye be not judged” means we shall in this matter reap in this world exactly as we sow: that if we defame others, we also shall be defamed, that if we refrain from rashly and censoriously censuring others we shall ourselves be spared the experience, *will not* stand the test of Holy Writ. Apply it to the Lord Jesus Christ and the treatment which He met with from man: He never unjustly or unmercifully censured another, yet how frequently were false and cruel charges preferred against Him. Apply the principle to the life of the Apostle Paul and see how completely it breaks down: can we suppose that God had employed him to write 1 Corinthians 13 had he been of a censorious, complaining, pharisaical spirit? yet he was “defamed” on every side and accounted “the offscouring of all things” (1 Cor. 4:13)! No, such an explanation, such a theory, will stand neither the test of Scripture nor of Christian experience and observation today.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” In view of what has been pointed out we cannot avoid the conviction that many of the commentators unwittingly toned down this solemn portion of the Truth, blunting the sharp edge of the Sword of the Spirit, for it seems clear to us that some vastly more awe-inspiring motive was in our Lord’s mind—a far weightier dissuasive from the sin forbidden than the treatment we shall meet with at the hands of our fellows. We are persuaded that what Christ here had reference to was not the judgments of men but the judgments of God—not the decisions of time but the verdicts of eternity. In reality it is but a sop for the conscience, a sewing of “pillows to all elbows” (Ezek. 13:18), to tell people if they are guilty of transgressing this precept and unlawfully judging others that all they have to fear is being unrighteously judged by their fellows. But for Christ to declare that such conduct will meet with *Divine* judgment at the Awful Assize is a warning which may well make the most thoughtless consider and the stoutest heart to quake.

It should, however, be pointed out that this warning of Christ’s is not to be understood as meaning: if you are generous in the verdicts you pass upon others, God will be lenient in His judgment concerning you. But if you are harsh and cruel, God will deal severely with you. No, whatever our judgments of others may be, God’s judgment will be “according to truth” and that “without respect of persons” (Rom. 2:2, 11). Thus we understand our Lord to mean: Beware of forming wrong judgments of your brethren and fellow-men, especially hasty and unmerciful ones, for all your judgments are to be *reviewed* in the searching light of God’s Throne, and by those judgments you are yourselves to be then judged. Not that the judgments we form of each other are to be the sole test by which our profession will be weighed and our character tried, but that this will be *one* of the tests. “By thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:37) will be another—our treatment of Christ’s brethren, as Mat-

thew 25 plainly intimates, will be yet another. Take care, then, that your judgments of others be such as will endure the scrutiny of the Divine Judge, for if they are not, they must lead to disapproval.

We are well aware of the fact that what we have said above is contrary to most of the teaching of the day even in orthodox circles. So much emphasis has been laid upon certain favourite verses that the balance of Truth has been lost here, as it has almost everywhere else. Such a statement as, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21) has been interpreted to mean that God looks not upon His people as they are in themselves but ever views them in Christ, and therefore sees them as *without any sin*. But such an idea is flatly contradicted by Holy Writ. God does take cognizance of our sins and plainly declares, "If his children forsake My Law and walk not in My judgments, if they break My statutes and keep not My commandments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes" (Psa. 89:30-31). Believers are required to confess their sins and both their forgiveness and cleansing is made contingent thereon (1 John 1:9). It is blessedly true that the believer has a perfect *standing* or status in Christ before God, yet that must not be made to swallow up his *state* and present case.

We would not for a moment consciously weaken the glorious force of "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), and "he that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (Greek "judgment") but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Yet those verses must not be understood in such a way as to clash with other portions of God's Word. For example, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the House of God" (1 Peter 4:17). No born-again soul shall ever suffer the *eternal* judgment of God, for he has forever passed beyond the reach of penal death or the curse of the Law, Christ having suffered the curse on his behalf. But though beyond the *curse* of the Law, Christians are subject to the *government* of God, and that government will not make light of wrong-doing nor relinquish its righteous requirements. Sin is no less sinful when committed by a believer than by an unbeliever, and unless it be repented of and put right before God in this life it will have to be put right in the Day to come. And who that loves holiness would wish it were otherwise! Many a breach between fellow Christians is never healed in this world: must not things be put right between them before they can spend eternity together in Heaven?

Both the orthodox pulpit and what is regarded as sound literature convey the impression that no matter how grievously the Christian may have failed in his duty, he has nothing to fear so far as the next life is concerned—that however careless and fruitless he has been—unclouded bliss awaits him after death. But between death and eternity proper is the Day of judgment! The Truth is now so watered down and so accommodated to the carnal mind that the Lord's people are led to complacently believe that so far as they are concerned, that Day will be solely one of receiving rewards and words of praise. But this writer does not so read the Scriptures: he finds another class of passages which set forth quite a different aspect of the Truth, and though those passages are now almost universally shelved, or "explained away" when pressed upon the attention of those claiming to be Christians, he dare not ignore them or fritter them down.

"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? *for* we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ: for it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every

knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:10, 11). We merely call attention to the bare fact that the judgment-seat of Christ is here set before believers as *a solemn motive* to refrain from judging their brethren, a motive which will have no force if commendation is all they are to receive there. And this warning is immediately followed with, “So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.” That this rendering of accounts will be something more than a mere formality scarcely needs to be pointed out. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; *yet so as by fire*” (1 Cor. 3:13-15). This has reference to the adjudication of the labours of Christ’s servants, when their work will be subjected to the searching scrutiny of Divine holiness: “saved, yet so as by fire” certainly does not suggest a happy experience—not that we understand there is anything in these verses which furnishes the slightest support to the Popish “purgatory.” Ministers would do well to seriously ponder this passage and turn it into earnest prayer.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ: that everyone *may receive* the things done in his body, *according to* that he hath done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The “we” takes in the whole election of grace, all who are redeemed by Christ. That there will be something more than the handing out of bouquets is plainly intimated in “that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good *or bad*.” An awe-inspiring description of Christ in His office of judge (when inspecting and passing sentence upon His churches) is given in Revelation 1, where He is seen with “His eyes as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace: and His voice as the sound of many waters” (v. 14, 15). “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). Observe the solemn motive given for enforcing this solemn precept: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong *shall receive for the wrong* which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons” (vv. 24, 25)! That some will be “*ashamed* before Him” in that Day is clear from 1 John 2:28. May the Lord enable both writer and reader to live his life more and more with the Judgment-seat of Christ before him.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.*24. In Flight.*

The lot of God's people is a varied one and their case is marked by frequent change. We cannot expect that it should be otherwise while they are left in this scene, for there is nothing stable here—mutability and fluctuation characterizes everything under the sun. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, and the common experience of saints is no exception to this general rule. "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Christ plainly warned His disciples: yet He added, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," and therefore ye shall share in My victory. Yet though victory is sure, we suffer many defeats along the way. We do not enjoy unbroken summer in our souls; nor is it always winter with us. Our voyage across the sea of life is similar to that encountered by mariners on the ocean: "they mount up to Heaven, they go down to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble . . . Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble and He bringeth them out of their distresses" (Psa. 107:26, 28).

Nor is it otherwise with God's public servants. True, they enjoy many privileges which are not shared by the rank and file of the Lord's people, and for these they must yet render an account. Ministers of the Gospel do not have to spend most of their time and strength amid the ungodly, toiling for their daily bread: instead they are shielded from constant contact with the wicked, and much of their time may be and should be spent in quiet study, meditation, and prayer. Moreover, God has bestowed special spiritual gifts on them: a larger measure of His Spirit, a deeper insight into His Word, and therefore they should be far better fitted to cope with the trials of life. Nevertheless, "tribulation" is also *their* portion while left in this Wilderness of Sin. Indwelling corruptions give them no rest day or night and the Devil makes them the special objects of his malice, ever busy seeking to disturb their peace and impair their usefulness, venting upon them the full fury of his hatred.

More may rightly be expected from the minister of the Gospel than from others. He is required to be "an example of the believers in word, in conversation, (behaviour), in charity (love), in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12); "in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity" (Titus 2:7). But though a "man of God," he is a "man" and not an angel—he is compassed with infirmity and prone to evil. God has placed His treasure in "earthen vessels" not steel or gold—easily cracked and marred, worthless in themselves: "that," adds the Apostle, "the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). That is, the glorious Gospel proclaimed by ministers is no invention of *their* brains and the blessed effects which it produces are in nowise due to *their* skill. They are but instruments, weak and valueless in themselves. Their message is God-given and its fruits are entirely of the Holy Spirit, so that they have no ground whatever for self-glorification, nor have those who are benefited by their labours any reason to make heroes out of them or look up to them as a superior order of beings, who are to be regarded as little popes or gods.

The Lord is very jealous of His honour and will not share His glory with another. His people profess to believe that as a cardinal truth, yet they are very apt to forget it. They, too, are human and prone to hero worship, prone to idolatry, prone to render unto the creatures that to which the Lord alone is entitled. Hence it is they so frequently meet with disappointment and discover their beloved idol is, like themselves, made of clay. For His own people God has chosen "the foolish things of this world," the "weak things," the "base things" and "things which are not" (mere "no-

“nobodies”), “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:27-29). And He has called sinful though regenerated men, and not holy angels, to be the preachers of His Gospel, that it might fully appear that “the excellency of the power” in calling sinners out of darkness into His marvellous light lies not in them nor proceeds from them, but that He alone gives the increase to the Seed sown by them. “So their neither is he that planteth (the evangelist) anything, neither he that watereth (the teacher), but *God*” (1 Cor. 3:7).

It is for this reason that God suffers it to appear that the best of men are but men at best. No matter now richly gifted they may be, how eminent in God’s service, how greatly honoured and used of Him, let His sustaining power be withdrawn from them for a moment and it will quickly be seen that they are “earthen vessels.” No man stands any longer than he is supported by Divine grace. The most experienced saint if left to himself is immediately seen to be as weak as water and as timid as a mouse. “Man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (Psa. 39:5). Then why should it be thought a thing incredible when we read of the failings and falls of the most favoured of God’s saints and servants? Noah’s drunkenness, Lot’s carnality, Abraham’s prevarications, Moses’ anger, Aaron’s jealousy, Joshua’s haste, David’s adultery, Jonah’s disobedience, Peter’s denial, Paul’s contention with Barnabas, are so many illustrations of the solemn truth that “there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20). Sinless perfection is found in Heaven, but nowhere on earth except in the Perfect Man.

Yet let it be pointed out that the failures of these men are not recorded in Scripture for us to hide behind, as though we may use them to excuse our own infidelities. Far from it: they are set before us as so many danger signals for us to take note of, as solemn warnings for us to heed. The reading thereof should humble us, making us more distrustful of ourselves. They should impress upon our hearts the fact that our strength is found alone in the Lord, and that without Him we can do nothing. They should be translated into earnest prayer that the workings of pride and self-sufficiency may be subdued within us. They should cause us to cry constantly, “Hold *Thou* me up and I shall be safe” (Psa. 119:117). Not only so, they should wean us from undue confidence in the creatures and deliver us from expecting too much of others. They should make us diligent in prayer for our brethren in Christ, especially for our pastors, that it may please God to preserve them from everything which would dishonour His name and cause His enemies to rejoice.

The man at whose prayers the windows of Heaven had been fast closed for three and a half years, and at whose supplication they had again been opened, was no exception: he, too, was made of flesh and blood, and this was permitted to be painfully manifest. Jezebel sent a message to inform him that on the morrow he should suffer the same fate as had overtaken her prophets. “And when he saw that he arose and went for his life” (1 Kings 19:3). In the midst of his glorious triumph over the enemies of the Lord, at the very time the people needed him to lead them in the total overthrow of idolatry and the establishment of true worship, he is terrified by the queen’s threat and flees. It was “the hand of the Lord” which had brought him to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46), and he received no Divine intimation to move from there. Surely it was both his privilege and duty to look unto his Master to protect him from Jezebel’s rage as He had before done from Ahab’s. Had he committed himself into the hands of God He had not failed him and great good had probably been accomplished if he now remained at the post where the Lord had put him.

But his eyes were no longer fixed upon God, instead they saw only a furious woman. The One who had miraculously fed him at the brook Cherith, who had so wondrously sustained him at the widow's home in Zarephath, and who had so signally strengthened him on Carmel, is forgotten. Thinking only of himself he flees from the place of testimony. But how is this strange lapse to be accounted for? Obviously his fears were excited by the queen's threat coming to him so *unexpectedly*. Was there not good reason for him now to be anticipating with great joy and exultation the co-operation of all Israel in the work of reformation? Would not the whole nation, who had cried "Jehovah, He is the God," be deeply thankful for his prayers having procured the much needed rain? And in a moment his hope seemed to be rudely shattered by this message from the incensed queen. Had he then lost all faith in God to protect him? Far be it from us to so charge him: rather does it seem that he was momentarily overwhelmed, panic stricken. He gave himself no time to think: but taken completely by surprise, he acted on the spur of the moment. How that gives point to "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16)!

While what has been pointed out above accounts for Elijah's hurried action, yet it does not explain his strange lapse. It was the absence of faith which caused him to be filled with fear. But let it be stated that the exercise of faith lies not at the disposal of the believer, so that he may call it into action whenever *he* pleases. Not so: faith is a *Divine gift* and the exercise of it is solely by Divine power; and both in its bestowment and its operations God acts sovereignly. Yet though God ever acts sovereignly, yet He never acts capriciously. He afflicts not willingly, but because we give Him occasion to use the rod; He withholds grace because of our pride, withdraws comfort because of our sins. God permits His people to experience falls along the road for various reasons, yet in every instance the outward fall is preceded by some failure or other on our part, and if we are to reap the full benefit from the recorded sins of such as Abraham, David, Elijah and Peter, we need to study attentively what led up to and was the occasion of them. This is generally done with Peter's case, yet rarely so with the others.

In most instances the preceding contexts give plain intimation of the first signs of declension, as a spirit of self-confidence signally marked the approaching fall of Peter. But in the case before us the previous verses supply no clue to the eclipse of Elijah's faith, yet the verses which follow indicate the cause of his relapse. When the Lord appeared unto him and asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9), the Prophet answered, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy Prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Does not that tell us, first, that he had been entertaining too great a regard of his own importance? Second, that he was unduly occupied with his service: "I, even I only am left"—to maintain Thy cause; and third, that he was chagrined at the absence of those results he had expected? The workings of pride—his threefold "I"—choke the exercises of faith. Observe how Elijah repeated those statements (v. 14) and how God's response seems by His very corrective to specify the disease—Elisha was appointed in his place!

God then withdrew His strength for the moment that Elijah might be seen in his native weakness. He did so righteously, for grace is promised only to the humble (James 4:6). Yet in this God acts sovereignly, for it is only by His grace that any man is kept humble. He gives more faith to one than to another, and maintains it more evenly in certain individuals. How great the contrast from Elijah's flight was Elisha's faith: when the king of Syria sent a great host to arrest

the latter and his servant said, "alas, my master! how shall we do?" the Prophet answered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:15, 16). When the empress Eudoxia sent a threatening message to Chrysostom, he bade her officer, "go tell her I fear nothing but sin." When the friends of Luther earnestly begged him not to proceed to the Diet of Worms to which he had been summoned by the pope, he replied, "Though every tile on the houses of that city were a devil I will not be deterred," and he went, and God delivered him out of his enemies' hands. Yet the infirmities of Chrysostom and Luther were manifested on other occasions.

It was his being occupied with circumstances which brought about Elijah's sad fall. It is a dictum of the world's philosophy that "man is the creature of his circumstances." No doubt this is largely the case with the *natural* man, but it should not be true of the Christian, nor is it so while his graces remain in a healthy condition. Faith views the One who orders our circumstances, hope looks beyond the present scene, patience gives strength to endure trials, and love delights in Him whom no circumstances affect. While Elijah set the Lord before him he feared not though an host encamped against him. But when he looked upon the creature and contemplated his peril he thought more of his own safety than of God's cause. To be occupied with circumstances is to walk by sight, and that is fatal both to our peace and spiritual prosperity. However unpleasant or desperate are our circumstances God is able to preserve us in them, as He did Daniel in the lion's den and his companions in the fiery furnace; yea He is able to make the heart triumph over them, as witness the singing of the Apostles in the Philippian dungeon.

Oh what need have we to cry, "Lord, increase our faith," for we are only strong and safe while exercising faith in God. If He is forgotten and His presence with us is not realized at the time when great dangers menace us, then we are certain to act in a manner unworthy of our Christian profession. It is by faith we stand (2 Cor. 1:24), as it is through faith we are kept by the power of God unto salvation (1 Peter 1:5). If we truly set the Lord before us and contemplate Him as being at our right hand, nothing will move us, none can make us afraid; we may bid defiance to the most powerful and malignant. Yet as another has said, "But where is the faith that never staggers through unbelief? the hand that never hangs down, the knee that never trembles, the heart that never faints?" Nevertheless, the fault is ours, the blame is ours. Though it lies not in our power to strengthen faith or call it into exercise, we may weaken it and can hinder its operations. After saying, "Thou standest by faith," the Apostle at once added, "Be not highminded, but fear" (Rom. 11:20)—be distrustful of self, for it is pride and self-sufficiency which stifles the breathings of faith.

Many have thought it strange when they read of the most noteworthy of Biblical saints failing in the very graces which were their strongest. Abraham is outstanding for his faith, being called "the father of all them that believe"; yet his faith broke down in Egypt when he lied to Pharaoh about his wife. We are told that, "Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3), yet he was debarred from entering Canaan because he lost his temper and spoke unadvisedly with his lips. John was the Apostle of love, yet in a fit of intolerance he and his brother James wanted to call down fire from Heaven to destroy the Samaritans, for which the Saviour rebuked them (Luke 9:54, 55). Elijah was renowned for his boldness, yet it was his courage which now failed him. What proofs are these that none can exercise those graces which most distinguish their characters without the immediate and constant as-

sistance of God, and that when in danger of being exalted above measure they are often left to struggle with temptation without their accustomed support. Only by conscious and acknowledged weakness are we made strong.

A few words only must suffice in making application of this sad incident. Its outstanding lesson is obviously a solemn warning unto those occupying public positions in the Lord's vineyard. When He is pleased to work through and by them there is sure to be bitter and powerful opposition stirred up against them. Said the Apostle, "A great and effectual door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9)—the two ever go together; yet if the Lord be our confidence and strength there is nothing to fear. A heavy and well-nigh fatal blow had been given to Satan's kingdom that day on Carmel, and had Elijah stood his ground, would not the seven thousand secret worshippers of Jehovah have been emboldened to come forth on his side, the language of Micah 4:6, 7 been accomplished, and the captivity and dispersion of his people spared? Alas, one false step and such a bright prospect was dashed to the ground, and never returned. Seek grace, thou servant of God, to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

But does not this sad incident also point a salutary lesson which all believers need take to heart? This solemn fall of the Prophet comes almost immediately after the marvels which had been accomplished in response to his supplications. How strange!—rather, how searching! We have emphasized how the glorious transactions wrought upon Mount Carmel supply the Lord's people with a most blessed illustration and demonstration of the efficacy of prayer, and surely this pathetic sequel shows what need they have to be on their guard when they have received some notable mercy from the Throne of Grace. If it was needful that the Apostle should be given a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be "exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations" vouchsafed him (2 Cor. 12:7), then what need have we to "rejoice *with trembling*" (Psa. 2:11) when we are elated over receiving our petitions.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

8. *Its Elucidation.*

If we are to attain anything approaching completeness of this aspect of our subject it is necessary that we discuss the particular and special case of *the Christian's inability*, for this is a real, yet distinct, branch of our theme, though all the writers we have consulted thereon appear to have studiously avoided it. This is, in some respects, admittedly the most difficult part of our problem, yet that is no reason why it should be evaded. If Holy Writ has nothing to say thereon, then we must be silent too; but if it makes pronouncement, it is our duty to believe and endeavour to understand what that pronouncement signifies. As we have seen, the Word of God plainly and positively affirms the moral impotency of the natural man unto good, and at the same time teaches throughout that the fallen creature is a responsible and accountable agent—that his depravity supplies not the slightest extenuation for his transgressing of the Divine Law. But the question we now desire to look squarely in the face is, How is it with the one who has been born again? Wherein does his case and condition differ from what it was previously, both with respect to his ability to do those things which are pleasing to God and the extent of his responsibility?

We begin by asking the question, Are we justified in employing the expression "the Christian's spiritual impotency," or is it not a contradiction in terms? Answer, Scripture does warrant the use of it. "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5), connotes that the believer has no power of his own to bring forth any fruit to the glory of God. "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18): such an acknowledgement from the most eminent of the Apostles makes it plain that no saint has strength on his own to meet the Divine requirements. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to *think* anything as of ourselves" (2 Cor. 3:5): if insufficient of ourselves to even think a good thought, how much less so to perform a good deed. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye *cannot* do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17): that "cannot" clearly authorizes us to speak of the Christian's inability. Every prayer for Divine succour and strength is a tacit confirmation of the same truth.

Then if such is the case of the Christian, wherein is he, in this matter, any better off than the non-Christian? Is not this to evacuate regeneration of its miraculous and most blessed element? We must indeed be careful not to disparage the gracious work of the Spirit in the new birth, nevertheless we must not lose sight of the fact that regeneration is only the *beginning* of His good work in the elect (Phil. 1:6), and that the best of them are but imperfectly sanctified in this life (Phil. 3:12). That there is a real, yea, a radical difference, between the unregenerate and the regenerate is gloriously true: the former are dead in trespasses and sins, the latter have passed from death unto life. The former are the subjects and slaves of the Devil. The latter have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). The former are completely and helplessly under the dominion of sin: the latter have been made free from sin's dominion and become the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:14, 18). The former despise and reject Christ: the latter love and desire to serve Him.

In seeking to grapple with the problem of the Christian's spiritual inability and the nature and extent of his responsibility, there are two dangers to be avoided, two extremes to guard against: namely, practically reducing the Christian to the level of the unregenerate, which is virtually a denial of the reality and blessedness of regeneration; and, making out the Christian to be well-

nigh independent and self-sufficient. That which must be aimed at is a preserving of the balance between, “without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5) and, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). That of which we are now treating is part of the Christian paradox, for the believer is often a mystery to himself and a puzzle to others, such strange and perplexing contraries meeting in him. He is the Lord’s free man, yet declares, “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). He rejoices in the Law of the Lord, yet cries, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom. 7:24). He acknowledges to the Lord, “I believe,” yet in the same breath prays, “help Thou mine unbelief.” He declares, “when I am weak then am I strong.” One moment he is praising his Saviour and the next groaning before Him.

Wherein does the regenerate differ from the unregenerate? First, he has been given an understanding that he may know Him which is true (1 John 5:20). His mind has been supernaturally illumined, spiritual light shines in his heart (2 Cor. 4:6), which capacitates him to discern spiritual things after a spiritual and transforming manner (2 Cor. 3:18)—nevertheless its development may be hindered by neglect and sloth. Second, he has a liberated will so that he is capacitated to consent unto and embrace spiritual things: his will has been freed from that total bondage and dominion of sin which he lay under by nature. Nevertheless he is still dependent upon God’s working in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Third, his affections are changed so that he is capacitated to relish and delight in the things of God and therefore does he exclaim, “O how love I Thy Law.” Before, he saw no beauty in Christ, but now He is “altogether lovely.” Sin which was formerly a spring of pleasure is now a fountain of sorrow. Fourth, his conscience is renewed, so that it reproves him for sins of which he was not previously aware and discovers in himself corruptions which he never suspected.

But if on the one hand there is a radical difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate, it is equally true that there is a vast difference between the Christian in this life and in that which is to come. While we must be careful not to belittle the Spirit’s work in regeneration, we must be equally on our guard lest we lose sight of the believer’s entire dependency upon God. The new nature which is imparted at regeneration is but a *creature* after all (2 Cor. 5:17), and therefore is not to be looked unto, rested in, and made an idol of. Though the believer has had communicated to him the principle of grace, yet he has no *store* of grace within himself from which he may now draw: he is but a “babe” (1 Peter 2:2), completely dependent on Another for everything. The new nature does not of itself empower or enable the soul unto a life of obedience and the performance of duty, it simply fits and makes it meet for such. The principle of spiritual life requires its Bestower to call it into operation. The believer is, in that respect, like a becalmed ship—waiting for a heavenly breeze to set it in motion.

Yet in another sense the believer resembles the crew of that ship, rather than the vessel itself, and herein he differs from those who are unrenewed. Before regeneration we are wholly passive, incapable of any co-operation, but the regenerate have a renewed mind to judge aright and a will to close with the things of God when moved by Him—nevertheless we are dependent upon His moving us. We are daily dependent upon God’s strengthening, exciting and directing the new nature, so that we need to pray, “incline my heart unto Thy testimonies . . . quicken Thou me in Thy way” (Psa. 119:36, 37). The new birth is a vastly different thing from the winding up of a clock, so that it will now run by itself: rather is the strongest believer like a glass without a base, which cannot stand one moment longer that it is *held*. The believer has to wait upon the Lord for

his strength to be renewed (Isa. 40:31). The Christian's strength is sustained solely by the constant operations and communications of the Holy Spirit, and he lives spiritually only as he clings closely to Christ and draws virtue from Him.

There is a suitableness or answerableness between the new nature and the requirements of God so that His commands "are not grievous" unto it (1 John 5:3), yea, so that Wisdom's ways are found to be "pleasant" and all her paths "peace" (Prov. 3:17). Nevertheless the believer stands in constant need of the help of the Spirit, working in him both to will and to do, granting fresh supplies of grace so as to enable him to perform his spiritual desires. A simple delight in the Divine Law is not of itself sufficient to produce obedience: we have to pray, "make me to go in the path of Thy commandments" (Psa. 119:35). Regeneration conveys to us an inclination and tendency unto that which is good, thereby fitting us for the Master's use. But we have to look outside ourselves for enabling grace: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). Thereby God removes all ground for boasting. He would have all the glory given to His grace: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

If sufficient rain fell in one day to suffice for several years we should not so clearly discern the mercies of God in His providence or be kept looking to Him for continued supplies. So it is in connection with our spiritual lives: we are daily made to feel that "our sufficiency is of God." The believer is entirely dependent upon God for the exercise of his faith and for the right use of his knowledge. Said the Apostle: "I live yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20), which gives the true emphasis and places the glory where it belongs. But observe he at once added, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God (by the faith of which He is its Object), who loved me and gave Himself for me": *that* preserves the true balance. Though it was Christ who lived in and empowered him, yet he was not passive and idle. He put forth acts of faith upon Him and thereby drew virtue from Him, and thus he could do all things through Christ strengthening him.

It is at that very point the responsibility of the Christian appears. As a creature, his responsibility is the same as pertains to the unregenerate, but as a *new creature in Christ Jesus* (2 Cor. 5:17) he has incurred increased obligations, for "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). The Christian is responsible to walk in newness of life, to bring forth fruit unto God as one who is alive from the dead, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, to use his spiritual endowments and to improve or employ his talents. The call comes to him, "stir up the gift of God which is in thee" (2 Tim. 1:6). Of old the Prophet complained of God's people, "there is none that stirreth up himself to lay hold of Thee" (Isa. 64:7), which condemns slothfulness and spiritual lethargy. The Christian is responsible to use all the means of grace which God has provided for his well-being, looking to Him for His blessing upon the same. When it is said, "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities" (Rom. 8:26) the Greek word is "helpeth together"—He co-operates with our diligence—not our idleness.

The Christian has received spiritual life and all life is a power to act by. Inasmuch as that spiritual life is a principle of grace animating all the faculties of the soul, he is capacitated to use all means of grace which God has provided for his growth and to avoid everything which would hinder or retard his growth. He is required to keep his heart with all diligence (Prov. 4:23), for if the fountain is kept clean the springs which issue therefrom will be pure. He is required to "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14), suffering not his mind and

affections to fix themselves on sinful or unlawful objects. He is required to deny himself, take up his cross and follow the example which Christ has left him. He is commanded, "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15), and therefore he must conduct himself as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene, abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11) if he would not lose the heavenly inheritance (1 Cor. 9:27). And for the performance of these difficult duties he must diligently and earnestly seek supplies of grace counting upon God to bless the means to him.

No small part of the Christian's burden and grief is the inward opposition he meets with, thwarting his aspirations and bringing him into captivity to that which he hates. The believer's "life" is a *hidden* one (Col. 3:3), and so also is his conflict. He longs to love and serve God with all his heart and to be holy in all manner of conversation, but the flesh resists the spirit. Worldliness, unbelief, coldness, slothfulness exert their power: the believer struggles against their influence and groans under their bondage. He desires to be clothed with humility, but pride is ever breaking forth in some form or other. He finds that he cannot attain unto that which he desires and approves. He discovers a wide disparity between what he knows and does, between what he believes and practices, between his aims and realizations. Truly he is "an unprofitable servant." He is so often defeated in the conflict that he is frequently faint and weary in the use of means and performance of duty, and made to question the genuineness of his profession, and tempted to give up the fight.

In seeking to help distressed saints concerning this sore trial, the servant of God needs to be very careful lest he foster a false peace as mere formalists, who have an historical faith in the Gospel but are total strangers to its saving power, and especially not to bolster up hypocritical professors who delight in the mercy of God but hate His holiness, and misappropriate the doctrine of His grace and make it subservient to their lusts. He must therefore call upon his hearers to honestly and diligently examine themselves before God, that they may discover *where* the inward oppositions arise and *what are* their reactions to the same. Whether they spring from an unwillingness to wear the yoke of Christ and whether their whole hearts accompany and consent unto such resistances to God's righteous requirements—or if these oppositions to God's Laws have their rise in corruptions which they sincerely endeavour to oppose, which they hate, which they mourn over, confess to God, and long to be released from.

When describing the conflict in himself between the flesh and the spirit—indwelling sin and the principle of grace he had received at the new birth—the Apostle declared, "For that which I do (which is contrary to the holy requirements of God) I allow not"—approve not of it—it is foreign to my real inclinations and purpose of heart—"but what I hate, that I do" (Rom. 7:15). The evil which rose up within him he detested and yearned to be delivered from. Far from affording him any satisfaction it was his great burden and grief. And thus it is with every truly regenerated soul when he is in his right mind. He may be, yea *is*, frequently overcome by his carnal and worldly lusts, but instead of being pleased at such an experience and contentedly lying down in his sins, as a sow delights to wallow in the mire, he cries out in distress, by God's grace, confesses such falls as grievous sins, and prays to be cleansed therefrom.

"If I were truly regenerate, how could sin rage so fiercely within and so often obtain the mastery over me?" is that which deeply exercises many of God's people. Yet does not Scripture declare, "For a just man falleth seven times" (Prov. 24:16), but observe it at once adds, "and riseth

up again.” Was it not the lament of David, “iniquities prevail against me” (Psa. 65:3), yet if you are striving to mortify your lusts, looking daily to the blood of Christ to pardon and begging the Spirit to more perfectly sanctify you, you may add with the Psalmist, “As for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.” Yea, did not the highly-favoured Apostle declare, “For we know that the Law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold (*not* “unto,” but) *under* sin” (Rom. 7:14). Yet there is a vast difference between Paul and Ahab, of whom we read that he “did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 21:25). It is the difference between one who is taken captive in war, becoming a slave unwillingly and longing for deliverance, and one who voluntarily abandons himself to a course of open defiance of the Almighty and who so loves evil that he would refuse release.

We must distinguish between sin’s “dominion” over the unregenerate and sin’s tyranny and usurpation over the regenerate. “Dominion” follows upon *right* of conquest or subjection. Sin’s great design in all of us is to obtain undisputed dominion: it has it in unbelievers and contends for it in believers. But every evidence the Christian has that he is under the rule of grace is that much evidence he is *not* under the dominion of sin. “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:22, 23). That does not mean sin always triumphs in the act, but that it is a hostile power which the renewed soul cannot evict—it wars against us in spite of all we can do. The general frame of believers is that notwithstanding sin being a “law” (or governing force) not “to” but “*in*” them is, that they “would (desire and resolve to) do good,” but “evil is present” with them. Their habitual inclination is unto good, and they are brought into captivity against their will. It is the “flesh” which prevents the full realization of their holy aspirations in this life.

But still the question presses on us, If the Son has “made us free” (John 8:36), how can Christians be in bondage? Answer, Christ has already freed them from the *guilt* and *penalty*, *love* and *dominion of sin*, but not yet from its presence. As the believer hungers and thirsts after righteousnesses, pants for communion with the living God, and yearns to be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, he is “free from sin,” but as such longings are more or less thwarted by indwelling corruptions, he is still “sold under sin.” Then let prevailing lusts humble you, cause you to be more watchful, and seek more diligently unto Christ for deliverance. Those very exercises will evidence a principle of grace in you which desires and seeks after the destruction of inborn sin. Those who have hearts set on pleasing God are earnest in seeking from Him enabling grace, yet they must remember He works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, maintaining His sovereignty in this as in everything else. Bear in mind that it is *allowed* sin which paralyzes the new nature.

Thus God has not yet uprooted sin from the soul of the believer and suffers him to groan under its uprisings that his pride may be stained and his heart made to constantly feel he is not worthy of the least of His mercies—to produce in him that feeling of dependence on Divine power and grace. To exalt the infinite condescension and patience of God in the apprehension of the humbled saint. To place the crown of glory on the only Head worthy to wear it: “not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto *Thy name* give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth’s sake” (Psa. 115:1).—A.W.P.

THE DIVINE AGENCY IN WAR

Jeremiah 51:20

George Lawson

3. The glory of the Divine sovereignty ought likewise to be acknowledged in the destruction of kingdoms and desolation of countries. If God should be pleased to inflict His tremendous judgments upon all sinning nations, the sons of men would soon be utterly consumed. He destroys some while He spares others, and who shall ask Him why He bears with nations more guilty than those whom He destroys and inflicts His vengeance upon those whose wickedness admitted of some excuse? His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out when He suffers some to live, become old and wax mighty in power, while others less wicked perish in youth. Instead of questioning His absolute sovereignty over the nations, admire His longsuffering to us.

4. We ought to give glory to our Saviour as well as to the Father who has committed all judgment to Him. God has given Him power to destroy as well as to save. The destruction of Jerusalem was one of the great days of the Son of man, in which His glory appeared in the destruction of His enemies as well as in the salvation of His followers. Then was fulfilled, in part, what our Lord foretold in the presence of the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:64). The God of Zion lives, the King of Zion reigns over the nations: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, and give praise to His name for His great and terrible acts even though they perceive not His intention. He did all things well when He was on earth. He does all things well in Heaven.

5. We ought to take warning from the destruction of kingdoms by Divine judgments. Some tell us the ways of God are so incomprehensible to us that it is not consistent with the modesty and humility of such short-sighted creatures as we are to presume to give an account of His awful dispensations. He does what pleases Him and gives not account of any of His matters, and although we ought to believe He does always what is right, yet the special grounds on which this judgment ought to be formed are often so high above us that we must leave them to the secrets of God. True, we cannot penetrate the depths of any of the Divine counsels, yet much is said in Scripture about the grounds of God's displeasure against those nations whom He destroys, and Christian humility does *not* require us to regard those passages as sealed. Israel sinned greatly in the desert because they understood not the wonders of the Lord in Egypt, nor remembered the multitude of His mercies.

Our Lord, we are told, warns us in Luke 13:1, 2 against presumptuous intrusions into the secrets of God's counsel. True, He warns against the supposition that those whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices were greater sinners than others, yet in the very next verse Christ declared the miserable fate of those men was a warning to all His hearers to repent, lest they, too, perish. We should learn from His words there not to reckon ourselves better men or our nation a less guilty one than those which have lately been spoiled of their independence, merely because we have not suffered like judgments, and we should also learn that the Lord's voice in these judgments calls loudly to us, that *we, too*, may justly fear as great, or greater miseries, unless we repent.

But if their fate was a warning to others of the danger of impenitency, then sin must have been the cause of their miseries. It is not the execution of innocent men but of criminals that warns spectators not to violate the laws of their country. Charity does not require us to be blind

to the faults of other men or nations. If we do not believe anything to the disadvantage either of nations or of individuals when we have clear evidence of its truth, all history would be useless, for its pages are filled with accounts of human wickedness. When we know that all ranks of a nation are chargeable with the very iniquities which Scripture declares bring the wrath of God upon a people, ought we not to fear lest the same crimes amongst ourselves, if repentance prevail not, will bring the same ruin upon our own heads?

We may readily discover (especially from the book of Jeremiah) what were the charges which Good's Prophets brought against the people of Israel and Judah. And it cannot be denied that many of the same sins are prevalent amongst ourselves and that we have persisted in them in opposition to many warnings of the Word and Providence of God. Can it be denied that our iniquities have been highly aggravated by the greatness and clearness of our light by great and signal mercies, by solemn engagements to cleave unto the Lord? When God speaks to us by His Word can we be so impious as to turn a deaf ear to Him? When He confirms the solemn declarations of His Word by many awful works of His Providence, what excuse is left us if we are still disobedient to His voice? [Shall it also be said of Great Britain "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not?"—A.W.P.]

Is not a loud cry heard from every part of the Continent, that God is greatly displeased with the sins of the nations? What is Napoleon that he should be able to do so great things? The iniquities of the nations have put the sword into his hand and strengthened his arm. God is sore displeased with the contempt of His Gospel and Sabbaths, with the degeneracy of the Christian churches, with the wickedness of men of every rank, and has given commission to that terrible minister of His Providence to cut off and destroy nations not a few. Flee sin as from the face of a serpent. If all the serpents of the dust were commissioned to destroy us, they could not do us half the mischief that we have procured by our sins.

6. Use the means prescribed for averting from our land the dreadful calamities that have come upon other countries. But what can we do? Have we counsel or strength for war against an enemy flush with conquest, and conducted to new victories by commanders renowned for their courage and skill? Yet if you were called to expose your life for your king and country, such considerations ought not to deter you from a plain duty. If God be our Helper, we need not fear what man can do against us. But if that man is unworthy of the benefits which he derives from the government of his country, who would refuse to expose his life for its defense when Divine Providence calls him to do it? How much less does he deserve to share in these blessings who is so far from bearing his part in its defense that he adds, by his obstinacy in sin, to the causes of its danger, and perhaps of its ruin?

Our defense is in God, and He who provokes our Defender to depart from us is as really an enemy to his country as he who is chargeable with treason against the king. Although we should not increase the anger of the Lord by cursing and lying and other iniquities which bring down His wrath upon guilty nations, yet if we do not contribute our endeavour, in our places, to that *reformation of conduct* by which our judgments might be averted, we are but cold friends to our country. Yea, by neglecting what God requires of us as means of preventing judgments, we act the part of public enemies. They lie unto the Lord who pray to Him for the safety and success of our fleets and armies and yet do not sincerely desire and earnestly endeavour to have those evils removed which, if God governs the nations, are the most formidable obstacles to their success.

Turn ye to Him from whom we have all deeply revolted; warn and exhort all on whom you can have influence to turn from the evil of their ways. Thus did the king and people of Nineveh: and they were spared.

7. Seek safety to yourselves in the evil day if it should come upon others. We cannot certainly say what will be the end of these wonders that are now taking place in the world. Who knows whether Britain will be able at all times to make an effectual resistance to the conqueror of the Continent? But we know that there is a kingdom which cannot be moved, and that all the faithful subjects of its King shall enjoy full security under His government. When God, by His Prophets, foretells the most tremendous events that shall ever come upon the world, He gives full assurance to His people that although He make a full end of the other nations, He will not make a full end of them.

Take the yoke of Christ upon you and learn of Him, and you shall not only be safe in the evil day but you shall look down with pity upon these oppressors that waste and destroy the nations of the world. We cannot certainly say that you shall be exempted from all share in these evils that go about from nation to nation. It may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. But if you should fall by the hand of violence, angels will be sent down from Heaven to receive your souls and to conduct them to the abodes of bliss, where no tyrant that wears a diadem, no ruffian that carries a sword can reach you—where you shall share with Christ in those glories which the Father gave Him.

When Habakkuk heard of the awful works which God was about to do in the land, his belly trembled, his lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into his bones (3:16), yet he comforted himself with the well-grounded hope that he would rest in the day of evil and find everlasting solace and joy in the God of His salvation. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places" (Hab. 3:17-19).

The overthrow of thrones and the desolation of kingdoms are terrible events: but we know of events far more awful for guilty men. The earth and its works shall be burnt up: the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. In that day all the oppressors of the earth, if they died impenitent, shall receive the full recompense of all the indignities they did to God—of all the slaughter and devastation of which they were the guilty instrument. But all who were found faithful to God in evil times shall then also receive full reward of all that they did for the service of God and the benefit of men. If those who would not give a share of their bread to the hungry and of their drink to the thirsty shall have their part in the Lake of Fire with the devil and his angels, what chosen woes shall be the portion of the destroyers of their fellow-men? If every cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward, how rich will be the reward of those who exerted their utmost endeavours to convert sinners from the errors of their ways and to save guilty nations from destruction?!—(George Lawson, Minister of the Gospel, Selkirk, Scotland, 1811).

OUR ANNUAL LETTER.

“Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee” (Deut. 8:2). What a wonderful faculty is the *memory*! It enables us to live the past over again in our minds, to recall the conversations of those who are no longer with us, yea, to review early childhood. Yet how solemn to be Divinely assured that this faculty accompanies the lost into their hopeless eternity: “Son, *remember* that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things” (Luke 16:25), are the words addressed to one suffering the torments of Hell fire. How it will add to their anguish to think over opportunities wasted, privileges abused, warnings refused, entreaties flouted, Christ rejected. Many exhortations of Scripture are addressed to this faculty. Believers are bidden to, “Remember that in time past” they had “no hope” and (were) “without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11, 12), that they may marvel anew at God’s sovereign grace. They are called upon to, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy” (Exo. 20:8), God’s “marvelous works” (Psa. 105:5), “them that are in bonds” (Heb. 13:3), “the words which were spoken before of the Apostles” (Jude 17). One part of the gracious work of the Spirit is to aid our memories (John 14:26): do we seek this and count upon it?

“Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee.” Here we are bidden to recall and ponder our wilderness journey. It seems a most suitable word to have before us as we come to the end of a second decade in the life of this little magazine. Twenty years have now passed since the Lord called us to the work of this printed ministry, and it is fitting we should review the experiences encountered, especially His unfailing goodness and mercy. As we look back it is indeed blessed to know it *was* the Lord our God who was leading us—sometimes along strange paths which we had never ourselves chosen, sometimes in rough and hard places which tried us sorely. But we are to remember “all the way” and not simply the most unpleasant parts of it. O what patience He has exercised toward us, what faithfulness He has displayed, what lovingkindness He has shown.

When we began publishing this magazine we were members of a Baptist church and we still believe that according to their constitution and principles, Baptists are nearer the New Testament pattern than any other body. But in the Providence of God we were soon obliged to sever our connection with that church, and it was not long before our Master made it plain why He led us to take that step: the written ministry to which He had called us was designed for a wider circle than any single ecclesiastical fold. By the grace of God it has been our privilege to feed numbers of His sheep who are dispersed in many denominations, and not a few who have no church home on earth. We have therefore been constrained to take up nothing in these pages of a sectarian nature, endeavouring to steer clear of whatever would give unnecessary offense, confining ourselves (with rare exceptions) to “those things which are most surely believed among” (Luke 1:1) God’s people at large.

In order to be consistent with the undenominational character of our printed ministry, we have remained “unattached” ecclesiastically. Our desire and determination has been, by grace, to walk the Narrow Way with a broad heart—embracing all who evidence Christ within them. We were ready and willing to preach and teach God’s Word wherever we could do so without having “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,” speaking along the same lines as our writings: and in the early days of this magazine we held meetings in most of the leading evangelical denominations, both in the U.S.A. and in Australia. But since settling in Great Britain we have

found our services, though offered gratis, are not wanted. Had we been prepared to join a Baptist or Presbyterian church we could have obtained a hearing, but because we felt restrained from so doing we have received the cold shoulder everywhere. Sad indeed is the situation which has confronted us the last twelve years: on the one hand, a liberal or broad spirit and an open door we could not enter because of heterodoxy; on the other, those with an orthodox creed but a fast-closed door because of sectarian exclusiveness.

God's ways in Providence, as well as in grace, are often "past finding out" (Rom. 11:33) not only by ourselves, but by those looking on—as God's ways with Job were misinterpreted by his "friends." How often has the course we were led to follow been misunderstood and misjudged by those among whom we have gone. Because we were not free to take up a sectarian position, they supposed the reason we would not unite with their church was because we were looking for a "perfect one." We have longed to have Christian fellowship with all who love the Lord in sincerity, irrespective of which section of Christendom they belong to; but because we could not join their party the great majority have been offended, and the reports spread that we are "self-righteous" and "not able to get along with any of the Lord's people." It has therefore been a lonely path, yet it is the one our Master selected for us, and along which He, by His grace has led us.

Measured by miles the "all the way" of the past twenty years has been a very lengthy one, taking us tens of thousands of miles both by land and by sea. We were in the U.S.A. when we began publishing this little monthly messenger, and then the Lord led us to Sydney, Australia, where we had a most blessed time for upwards of three years, abundant opportunities being granted for preaching and teaching. From there He took us to England for a short season, where sore disappointments were encountered. The next five years were spent in widely different parts of the U.S.A., in which we still have many who are dear to us in the Lord, but church conditions had deteriorated so markedly and rapidly, there was little left corporately with which we could have any association. The last seven years we have sojourned in England (where the editor was born and educated) and Scotland, but with the exception of two or three individuals, we have been made to feel we are foreigners. Yet sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master: He was not wanted, especially by the religious leaders who hounded Him to death.

But let us now turn to the brighter side. How wondrously has the Lord cared for us! While on a long journey in the U.S.A. railroad strikers attempted to wreck the train we were on and very nearly succeeded, and we were delayed for many hours. In Oakland, California, while staying in a large wooden rooming house, it caught on fire, but not a thing of ours was even singed. In Los Angeles we went through a minor earthquake. When crossing from the South Sea Islands to Australia, a heavy monsoon struck our ship and she almost, but not quite, capsized—one passenger being washed overboard and others injured. When a friend was driving us home in Pennsylvania, while our car was going forty miles an hour another one crashed into us and both cars were severely damaged, but we experienced only slight bruises. At present, because of the War's censorship policies, we are not permitted to give details of what we went through the last year we were in Brighton and Hove, or on our journey here; but "the good hand of our God was upon us" (Ezra 7:28) and not a hair of our heads was harmed—undoubtedly an answer to the prayers of many of our readers.

Through these “journeys oft,” including four times right across the entire American Continent, and the lengthy ocean voyage—despite the moving of our tent so frequently—we were enabled to carry on the work of this magazine without any break. This was only made possible by the editor composing and his faithful partner typing out many articles both on trains and ships, and by friends mailing out the “Studies” after we had left a place. So by God’s grace, throughout these twenty years the magazine was never more than a few days late. When we began publishing it in 1922 we had a regular subscription price, but in 1927 were led to remove it and for several years offered it “Free to all who will read it,” looking to the Lord alone to supply the necessary funds; nor did He ever fail us. But because so many of that large class who are looking for something for nothing (preachers with good salaries, especially) traded upon the generosity of others, we felt it wrong to be a party to their dishonesty; yet still gladly furnishing it gratis to any of the genuinely poor of the flock, as well as to chaplains in the Navy, Army and Air Forces.

Not the least of God’s mercies has been His unfailing goodness in furnishing “Seed for the sower.” It is no small task to write four or five lengthy articles each month and provide variety for the same readers year in and year out—yet in spite of now having published several thousands—so far from wondering what to take up next, we experience difficulty in finding *space* for the many subjects we still wish to treat upon. So many-sided is the Truth, so inexhaustible God’s wondrous Word, so amazing His grace in opening up different portions to our understanding. There has indeed been some repetition, but not through lack of fresh material, but because the times in which our lot is cast demand repeated emphasis upon that which is now neglected or repudiated. Fuller light has caused us to modify and rectify some of our earlier views, but we are deeply thankful that we were preserved from any fundamental error—better far not to write at all than fatally mislead souls, as so many are doing today.

Despite increased costs of production all bills were promptly paid and we close with a nice balance to the good. Health and strength have again been granted us: now married twenty-five years without any serious illness. We have ever sought to live moderately, so “rationing” has not pinched us: no good thing has God withheld. We are again obliged to drop many names from our diminished mailing list, and trust that friends, especially in the U.S.A., will do all they can to secure new readers. The future is in the hands of the Lord. O to trust Him more fully and serve Him with all our might. With Christian greetings, Yours by Divine Mercy, A. W. and V. E. Pink.

