

Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 3**March, 1940****PEACE.**

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). Nowhere do the moral perfections of Christ appear more blessedly than in the peace which ever possessed His soul! There was nothing in His outward lot calculated to produce composure of mind and satisfaction of heart, but rather everything to the contrary. What did the world give to the Lord Jesus that would produce contentment? A manger for His cradle, the mountain side for His sleeping-chamber, a Cross on which to die. What was there in His circumstances or earthly portion which made for serenity of spirit?—what of external comforts, material riches, social prestige, human fame? Not only was there the absence of those things which are mostly prized by men, but there was the presence of their opposites—that which usually occasion repinings. Yet we never see Him ruffled or hear Him complaining: perfect peace ever possessed His heart.

Never was the peace of anyone so severely tested and tried as was that of Christ’s, yet nothing ever disturbed it to the slightest degree. No matter what the provocation, He ever remained calm and unperturbed. “When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not” (1 Peter 2:23). When His enemies spat in His face and plucked out His hair, there was no angry retort. Lack of appreciation from those whom He befriended embittered not His spirit. The vilest of charges were hurled against Him, the foulest indignities were heaped upon Him, yet they only served to demonstrate the unadulterated mildness of His temper. When affronted and ridiculed, He calmly bore their insults. When contradicted by presumptuous sinners He endured, with the utmost tranquility, their unreasonable cavils. Most gloriously did He make it manifest that He was “the Prince of Peace.”

As courage can only be displayed in the midst of danger, as perseverance requires prolonged difficulty and trial for its exemplification, so the virtue of peace needs provocation and opposition if its blessedness is to be made fully evident. And therefore did Divine providence so order the path of our Redeemer that it might the more conspicuously appear that there was no conceivable experience which could disturb His equanimity. In public and in private, from foe and friend, in life and in death, He was antagonized and assaulted, but His perfect placidity remained unruffled. When enduring the inconceivable agonies of Gethsemane, with strong crying and tears, and bloody sweat, His disciples slumbered and slept. Did their slighted Master express hot resentment at such unkind treatment? No, far from it, He threw the mantle of charity over their failure to watch with Him for one hour, saying, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41).

Let us now endeavour to examine more closely this lovely grace so eminently displayed by the Lord Jesus. What was the nature of His peace? What were the essential elements which comprised it? First, an *unshakable confidence in the Divine providence*. Nothing is more effectual in stabilizing the mind and tranquilizing the heart as a firm and steadfast assurance that God controls and directs all the affairs of time. The Gospels record many examples of Christ’s confidence therein. Take what is mentioned in Matthew 17:27: there were thousands of fish in that sea—why should this particular one, at this particular moment, be found with the necessary coin when Peter caught and opened its mouth? Take again the incident described in Matthew 21:2, 3:

a dozen things might have caused the owner of that ass to change his mind and go elsewhere—Christ’s knowledge it *would* be there at that time was not only proof of His omniscience, but also of a particular Providence that orders every detail. Once more, consider Mark 4:35-41: why did Christ sleep so peacefully during the storm? Because He knew they were certain to reach “the other side” (v. 35)—the government of God so ordered it.

Second, His *unchanging trust in God*: that constituted a marked feature of Christ’s serenity. This is clear from, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa. 26:3). Christ was the only one who ever enjoyed that perfect peace in its undisturbed fullness, because He was the only one whose mind was perpetually stayed on Jehovah. “I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother’s belly” (Psa. 22:10). The Lord Jesus lived in complete dependence upon God throughout the whole of His earthly sojourn. He lived by faith on the precious promises of His heavenly Father. In Hebrews 2:11 the Apostle Paul declares, “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren,” and in proof thereof (v. 13) he quotes Psalm 18:2 where the Messiah affirmed, “I will put My trust in Him.” Christ’s trust in God evidenced Him to be one with His brethren, for in becoming the Son of man He was brought into a condition of trouble and distress wherein it was both His duty and privilege to count upon God for deliverance.

As this human perfection of the Saviour’ is so feebly apprehended today, we will dwell upon it a little further. So far from belittling the character of our Lord, the fact that He lived in complete dependence upon God makes manifest His moral perfections. “I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the LORD God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint” (Isa. 50:6, 7). If those words do not set forth the life of faith, what language could do so? “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:33, 34). How many of our readers are aware that that triumphant challenge of faith originally issued from the lips of the Man Christ Jesus? Such indeed was the case, as a reference to Isaiah 50:8, 9 clearly shows: at the very moment Pilate was condemning Him, Christ comforted Himself with the assurance that God would vindicate and declare Him righteous. Compare, too, His language in Psalm 16:8-10! That Christ made an open profession of His confidence in the Father is seen in the fact that His enemies reproached Him for “trusting in God” (Matt. 27:43).

Third, His *unparalleled meekness*. “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psa. 37:11). Pride and self-will lie at the root of all unrest and discontent, as they are responsible for our quarrelling with the dispensations of God. Dictators and disturbers of public peace are ever men of arrogance and self-assertiveness. But the Prince of Peace could say, “Learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Meekness is the only virtue which will keep the affections and passions in their proper place and poise. Meekness is the only grace which makes one submissive to God and pleased with all that pleases Him. “Behold Thy King cometh unto Thee, *meek*, and sitting upon an ass” (Matt. 21:5).

Many are the contrasts between the world’s peace and Christ’s. The world wishes for peace, Christ alone can bestow it. The world’s peace is carnal, shallow, and disappointing—but Christ’s

is spiritual, deep, and satisfying. The world's peace is a dearly-bought one, but Christ's is free. The world's peace is generally an unrighteous one, but Christ's is holy. The world can only give peace after trouble, but Christ can impart peace in the midst of trouble, lifting the heart above it. The world's peace is evanescent, Christ's is lasting, for His gifts are without repentance: He is in one mind in continuing as well as bestowing—His motives are in and of Himself, and therefore always the same. He secures by His power what He gives by His love. His peace cannot be taken away from us. A tyrant once threatened a saint, "I will destroy your home"—you cannot destroy my peace. "I will confiscate your goods"—you cannot rob me of my peace. "I will banish you from your country"—I will take my peace with me. This peace is the legacy of the Prince of Peace to His subjects, but the measure in which they enjoy it is determined by their obedience to God, their surrender to His sovereignty, and their fellowship with Him, and their heart's occupation with their future bliss.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

14. *The Law and Love*: Matthew 5:43-48.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (Matt. 5:43, 44). Few sections of the Sermon on the Mount have suffered more at the hands of expositors than has this one. Most of them, through failure to attentively weigh and rightly understand the whole context, have quite missed the scope of our passage. In consequence of such failure our Lord’s design in these verses has been misapprehended, the prevailing but erroneous idea being held that they set forth the vastly superior moral standard of the New Covenant over that which obtained under Judaism. Many have wrongly defined its principal terms, giving too restricted a meaning both to “neighbour” and “love.” Ludicrous indeed are the shifts made by some in the endeavours to harmonize their interpretation of these verses with the theological system to which they are committed.

How widely the commentators differ among themselves, and how ambiguous and unsatisfactory are their explanations will appear from the following quotations—taken from their remarks on “Love your enemies.” “We cannot have complacency in one that is openly wicked and profane, nor put a confidence in one that we know to be deceitful; *nor are we to love all alike*; but we must pay respect to the human nature, and so far honour all men: we must take notice, with pleasure of that even in our enemies which is amiable and commendable; ingenuity, good temper, learning, moral virtue, kindness to others, profession of religion, etc., and love that, though they are our enemies. We must have a compassion for them, and a good will toward them” (Matthew Henry). That seems to us about as clear as mud. First, this eminent author virtually tells us that we cannot love an enemy: then he affirms we must respect any good qualities we can discern in them: and closes with the statement that we should wish them well.

Much to the same effect are the reflections of Thomas Scott. He begins by asserting it is a Christian duty to love our enemies, to regard them “with benevolence, to return good works and kind wishes to their revilings and imprecations, and beneficent acts to their injuries.” But he spoils this by adding—“As however there are various favours which He bestows only on His people, so our peculiar friendship, kindness and complacency must and ought to be *restricted to the righteous*; yea, gratitude to benefactors and predilections for special friends consist very well with this general good will and good conduct toward enemies and persecutors.” Here again we are left wondering as to what our Lord really meant when He bade us “love your enemies.”

Andrew Fuller sought to cut the knot by having recourse to the subtleties of the Schoolmen, who insisted there are two different kinds of love, both in God and in man—wherein they confounded mere kindness with love. This writer said, “Much confusion has arisen on this subject from not distinguishing between benevolence and complacency. The one is due to all men, whatever be their character, so long as there is any possibility or hope of their becoming the friends of God; the other is not, but requires to be founded on character” (“On love to enemies”). The substance of which is that the love we exercise unto the enemies of God is of a totally different order from that which we bear to His children.

Stranger still is the method followed by the renowned John Gill in his effort to explain away Christ’s injunction that we must love our enemies. “I apprehend the love with which Christ exhorts His people to love their enemies is not to be understood quoad affectus (as respecting the

internal affections of love): I cannot believe that Christ requires of me that I should love a persecutor as I do my wife, my children, my real friend, or brother in Christ—but quoad effectus (as to the effects), that is, I am required to do those things as they lay in my way and according to my ability, as a man would do to his neighbour whom he loves—that is, feed him when he is hungry, and give him drink when thirsty” (from “Truth Defended”).

The explanation given by Mr. Gill is the worst of them all, for it contains a most serious error, implying as it does that outward compliance with God’s requirements will be accepted by Him even though the one spring from which all such actions must proceed be inactive. It is not the outward appearance, but the heart, God ever looks at. Now, “love is the fulfilling of the Law” (Rom. 13:10), and love is essentially a thing of the heart. Love is the fulfilling of the Law, because love to God and to man is all that it requires. Real obedience is nothing more and nothing less than the exercise of love and the directing of it to what God has commanded. Strictly speaking, there is no ground for the distinction commonly made of internal and external obedience: all true obedience is internal, consisting in the exercise of love, and external obedience is simply the expression thereof. Consequently, external conformity to the Divine Commands which proceeds not from *love*—holy affections—is worthless “dead works.”

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy” (Matt. 5:43). As we have passed from section to section of Matthew 5 we have warned against and sought to repudiate the widely-held mistake that Christ was here setting up a more spiritual and merciful law than the one which had been given at Sinai. In the verse just quoted we have additional proof, clear and conclusive, that our Lord was not engaged in pitting Himself against the law of Moses, but rather that He was concerned with the refuting and rejecting of the deadly errors of the Jewish teachers. The Pentateuch will be searched in vain for any precept which required the Israelites to entertain any malignity against their foes: thou shalt “hate thine enemy” was a rabbinical invention pure and simple.

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18): such was the original commandment. Now our Lord was not referring to this Divine statute at all, but to the Pharisees’ perversion of the same. True, they quoted the actual words, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” but they misunderstood and misapplied it. The lawyer’s question to Christ, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29), asked in order to “justify himself,” revealed the error of the party to which he belonged, as our Lord’s answer thereto made plain the scope of the term over which they stumbled. The Jewish rabbis restricted the word “neighbour” to friends or those closely related to them: to those of their nation and particularly those who belong to their own party.

The term “neighbour” is used in the Old Testament in a twofold manner: a wider and more general, and a narrower and more specific. In its common usage it includes anyone with whom we may come into contact, having respect unto our fellow men. In its specific sense it signifies one who is near to us by ties of blood or habitation. But anyone who searches the Scriptures should have been left in no uncertainty as to the Spirit’s meaning. “Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour and every woman of her neighbour jewels of silver and jewels of gold” (Exo. 11:2): the reference here is to the Egyptians among whom Israel then lived. “Strangers,” equally with “neighbours,” are represented as the proper objects of such a love as we bear to ourselves, and that, in the very chapter where the command to love our

neighbour is recorded: "If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him; but the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:33, 34).

So far from the Divine injunction, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," being restricted to those who are amiable and friendly toward us, in more than one passage in the Law even an adversary in a law-suit is described as a neighbour: "When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judged between one and his neighbour" (Hebrew of Exo. 18:16). Hence the inference, which the Pharisees should have drawn from the Divine statute would be, "Thou shalt love all men, even those who are seeking to injure thee." When God prohibited His people from bearing false witness against their neighbours, and when He forbade them coveting the wife of a neighbour (Exo. 20:16, 17), the prohibition must of necessity be understood without any limitation. Thus, the commandment to love their neighbours, properly understood, bade them to love all mankind.

As, then, this Divine precept commanded the Israelites to love all men, it most certainly prohibited the harbouring of a malignant spirit against anyone. But not only did the Jewish rabbis unwarrantably restrict the injunction to love their neighbours, but they also drew from it the false and wicked inference, "and hate thine enemy." How excuseless was any such conclusion appears from the fact that the command to love their neighbours was immediately preceded by the prohibition, "thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people" (Lev. 19:18), while verse 34 bade them to love as themselves any stranger living in their midst. To cherish any ill feeling against any enemy was directly opposed to both the letter and the spirit of the morality of the Law: no such sentiment was expressed in any form of words.

How utterly opposed to the Law itself was this evil conclusion of the rabbis will appear from the following Scriptures: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him" (Exo. 23:4, 5). "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the LORD see, and it displease Him" (Prov. 24:17, 18). "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov. 25:21). Nor were these unqualified precepts in anywise annulled by the special instructions Israel received through Moses and Joshua to destroy the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, for in so doing they were acting as the executioners of the righteous judgments of God upon those who were so corrupt and vile they were a public menace. Nor were they bidden to *hate* those miserable wretches. No foundation, then, was laid in those extraordinary judgments on the Canaanites for the general principle that hatred to enemies is lawful.

It may be objected to what has been pointed out above that there are some passages which seem to make against our contention. For example we find David saying, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Psa. 139:21, 22). Upon these verses we may remark: first, we must distinguish sharply between private and public enemies. The former is one who has done us some personal injury: even so, we must not hate him or retaliate. The latter is one who is in open and inveterate revolt against God, a menace to His cause and people: even so

though we righteously hate his evil cause and sins, we must not hate him. So in the above passage, it was the public enemies of Israel and of God whom David hated.

From what has been before us we may see in the case of the rabbis two abuses of the Scriptures—dangerous and disastrous abuses—against which every teacher of the Word must most diligently guard, namely, misinterpretation and the drawing of seemingly logical but false inferences. How necessary it is that the terms of Holy Writ should be rightly defined, and what labour is demanded from the teacher (often the patient examination of scores and sometimes hundreds of verses to discover how the Spirit has used a particular term) in order to achieve this; otherwise he is very liable to be guilty of causing error to pass for the Truth. Doubly solemn is that exhortation, “My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Greek of James 3:1).

Again, from what has been before us we may discover an infallible mark of a *false teacher*: he is one who deliberately panders to the corrupt inclinations of his auditors, adopting his message to their perverted inclinations, wresting the Scriptures so as to secure their approbation. The teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees was: Jews are required to love and do good unto their brethren after the flesh, but they are not only permitted, it is their bounden duty to cherish bitter enmity against the Gentiles. Such a doctrine was only too agreeable to the malignant and selfish principles of fallen human nature, and accordingly we find the Jews generally acted under its influence. “They readily show compassion to their own countrymen, but they bear to all others the hatred of an enemy” (Tacitus); while Paul describes them as, “contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak unto the Gentiles that they might be saved” (1 Thess. 2:16).

Finally, we may behold here *the fruit of false doctrine*, namely, evil communications corrupting good manners. The Jews have ever been a people marked by strong passions—loving their friends fervently and hating their enemies intensely. From the Pharisees’ corrupting of the Law of God so as to make it square with the prejudices of their disciples, the most evil consequences followed. Erroneous beliefs necessarily lead to erroneous conduct, for, “as a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” This principle is horribly exemplified in Roman Catholicism: their evil practices resulting from their false traditions. Thus, they regard their “places of worship” as more holy than any other buildings, and consequently many of the deluded Papists never engage in formal prayer except when they enter one of their “churches” or “cathedrals.”

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies.” From all that has been before us it should be quite plain that our Lord was not, in these words, pitting Himself against any Mosaic precept, nor even making an addition thereto: rather was He purging that Divine statute from the corruptions of the Scribes and Pharisees, and revealing the scope and high spirituality of God’s precepts. The love which the Divine Law demands is something vastly superior to what we call “natural affection”—love for those who are nearest to us by ties of blood is but a natural instinct or feeling—found in the heathen, and in a lower degree among the animals. The love which the Divine Law requires is a holy, disinterested and spiritual one. This is unequivocally established by the fact that our Lord linked inseparably together, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” and “thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:37-39)—our neighbour must be loved with the very same love that God is loved.

“But I—God incarnate, the Giver of the original Law—say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use

you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). In these words Christ does three things. First, expressly refutes the error of the Scribes and Pharisees who restricted the term “neighbour” unto friends and acquaintances, and shows that it is so all-encompassing as to include “enemies”: verily, God’s command is “exceeding broad” (Psa. 119:96). Second, He bluntly repudiates their evil teaching that an enemy is to be hated, affirming the *very opposite* to be the truth, insisting that God commands us to love even those who hate and injure us. Third, He makes crystal clear what is signified by “love,” namely, a holy, inward, and spiritual affection, which expresses itself in godly and kindly acts. Thus we are assured beyond any shadow of doubt that the Moral Law is of Divine origin, for who among men had ever conceived such a precept as “love for enemies!”—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

3. *Before Ahab.*

“When the Enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19). What is signified by the Enemy coming in “like a flood?” The figure used here is a very graphic and expressive one: it is that of an abnormal deluge which results in the submerging of the land, the imperiling of property and life itself, threatening to carry everything before it. Aptly does such a figure depict the moral experience of the world in general, and of specially-favoured sections of it in particular, at different periods in their history. Again and again a flood of evil has broken loose, a flood of such alarming dimensions that it appeared as though Satan would succeed in beating down everything holy before him, when by an inundation of idolatry, impiety and iniquity, the Cause of God upon earth seemed in imminent danger of being completely swept away.

“When the Enemy shall come in like a flood.” We have but to glance at the context to discover what is meant by such language. “We wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes. . . . For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us. . . . In transgressing and lying against the LORD and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward and justice standeth afar off: for Truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter. Yea. Truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad” (Isa. 59:9-15, see margin of v. 15). Nevertheless when Satan has brought in a flood of lying errors and lawlessness has become ascendant, the Spirit of God intervenes and thwarts Satan’s vile purpose.

The solemn verses quoted above accurately describe the awful conditions which obtained in Israel under the reign of Ahab and his heathen consort Jezebel. Because of their multiplied transgressions, God had given up the people to blindness and darkness and a spirit of falsehood and madness possessed their hearts. In consequence, Truth was fallen in the street—ruthlessly trampled underfoot by the masses. Idolatry had become the State religion: the worship of Baal was the order of the day: wickedness was rampant on every side. The Enemy had indeed come in like a flood, and it looked as though there was no barrier left which could stem its devastating effects. Then it was that the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him, making public demonstration that the God of Israel was highly displeased with the sins of the people, and would now visit their iniquities upon them. That heavenly standard was raised aloft by the hand of Elijah.

God has never left Himself without witnesses on earth. In the very darkest seasons of human history the Lord has raised up and maintained a testimony for Himself. Neither persecution nor corruption could entirely destroy it. In the days of the antediluvians, when the earth was filled with violence and all flesh had corrupted His way, Jehovah had an Enoch and a Noah to act as His mouthpieces. When the Hebrews were reduced to abject slavery in Egypt, the Most High sent forth Moses and Aaron as His ambassadors, and at every subsequent period in their history one Prophet after another was sent to them. So also has it been throughout the whole course of Christendom: in the days of Nero, in the time of Charlemagne, and even in the dark ages—despite the incessant opposition of the Papacy—the Lamp of Truth was never extinguished. And so here in 1 Kings 17 we behold again the unchanging faithfulness of God to His covenant, by

bringing upon the scene one who was very jealous of His glory and who feared not to denounce His enemies.

Having already dwelt upon the significance of the particular office which Elijah exercised, and having looked at his mysterious personality, let us now consider the meaning of his name. A most striking and declarative one it was, for Elijah may be rendered, "my God is Jehovah," or "Jehovah is my God." The apostate Nation had adopted Baal as their deity, but our Prophet's name proclaimed the true God of Israel. Judging from the analogy of Scripture we may safely conclude that this name was given to him by his parents, probably under prophetic impulse or in consequence of a Divine communication. Nor will this be deemed a fanciful idea by those acquainted with the Word. Lamech called his son Noah, saying, "This same shall comfort us (or be a rest to us) concerning our work" (Gen. 5:29)—"Noah" signifying rest or comfort. Joseph gave names to his sons expressive of God's particular providences to him (Gen. 41:51, 52). Hannah's name for her son (1 Sam. 1:20) and the wife of Phinehas for hers (1 Sam 4:19-22) are further illustrations.

We may observe that the same principle holds good in connection with many of the *places* mentioned in the Scriptures: Babel (Gen. 11:9), Beersheba (Gen. 21:31), Massah and Meribah (Exo.17:7) and Cabul (1 Kings 9:13 margin) being cases in point. Indeed no one who desires to understand the Sacred Writings can afford to neglect a careful attention to proper nouns. The importance of this receives confirmation in the example of our Lord Himself, for when bidding the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam it was at once added: "which is by *interpretation* Sent" (John 9:7). Again, when Matthew records the angel's command to Joseph that the Saviour was to be named Jesus, the Spirit moved him to add, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophets, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which *being interpreted is*, God with us" (1:21, 23) compare also the words "which is, being interpreted" in Acts 4:36; Hebrews 7:1, 2.

It will thus be seen that the example of the Apostles warrants us to educe instruction from proper names (for if not all of them, many embody important truths), yet this must be done with modesty and according to the analogy of Scripture, and not with dogmatism or for the purpose of establishing any new doctrine. How aptly the name Elijah corresponded to the Prophet's mission and message is at once apparent, and what encouragement every consideration of it would afford him! We may also couple with his striking name the fact that the Holy Spirit has designated Elijah "the Tishbite" (1 Kings 17:1), which significantly enough denotes *the stranger here*. And we must also take note of the additional detail that he was, "of the inhabitants of Gilead," which name means *rocky* because of the mountainous nature of that country. It is ever such an one whom God takes up and uses in a critical hour: a man who is out and out for Him, in separation from the religious evil of his day, and who dwells on high; a man who in the midst of fearful declension carries in his heart the testimony of God.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). This memorable event occurred some 700 years before the birth of Christ. For the dramatic suddenness, the exceeding boldness, and the amazing character of it, there are few of a like nature in Sacred History. Unannounced and unattended, a plain man,

dressed in very humble garb, appeared before Israel's apostate king as the messenger of Jehovah and the herald of dire judgment. No one in the court would know much, if anything, about him, but he had just emerged from the obscurity of Gilead, to stand before Ahab with the keys of Heaven in his hand. Such are often the witnesses to His Truth which God has employed. At His bidding they come and go: not from the ranks of the influential and learned do they issue. They are not the products of this world system, nor does the world place any laurels on their brow.

"As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." There is much more in this expression, "the LORD God of Israel liveth," than meets the eye at first glance. Observe that it is not simply, "the LORD God liveth," but "the LORD God *of Israel*," which is also to be distinguished from the wider term "the LORD of hosts." At least three things were signified thereby. First, "the LORD God of Israel" threw particular emphasis upon His special relationship to the favoured Nation: Jehovah was their King, their Ruler, the One with whom they had to do, the One with whom they had entered into a solemn covenant. Second, Ahab is thereby informed that He *lives*. This grand fact had evidently been called into question. During the reigns of one king after another Israel had openly mocked and defied Jehovah, and no dire consequences had followed; and so the false idea had come to prevail that the Lord had no real existence. Third, this affirmation, "the LORD God of Israel liveth" pointed a striking contrast from the lifeless idols whose impotency should now he made apparent—unable to defend their deluded votaries from the wrath of God.

Though for wise reasons of His own, God "bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22), yet He affords clear and sufficient proof throughout the course of human history that He is even now the Governor of the wicked and the Avenger of sin. Such a proof was then given to Israel. Notwithstanding the peace and prosperity which the kingdom had long enjoyed, the Lord was highly incensed at the gross manner in which He had been publicly insulted, and the time had arrived for Him to severely punish the wayward people. Accordingly He sent Elijah to Ahab to announce the nature and duration of His scourge. It is to be duly noted that the Prophet came with his awe-inspiring message not to the people, but to the king himself—the responsible head, the one who had it in his power to rectify what was wrong by banishing all idols from his dominion.

Elijah was now called upon to deliver a most unpalatable message unto the most powerful man in all Israel, but conscious that God was with him he flinched not from such a task. Suddenly confronting Ahab, Elijah at once made it evident that he was faced by one who had no fear of him, king though he were. His very first words informed Israel's degenerate monarch that he had to do with the living God. "As the LORD God of Israel liveth," was an outspoken confession of the Prophet's faith, as it also directed attention to the One whom Ahab had forsaken. "Before whom I stand": that is, whose servant I am (cf. Deut. 10:8; Luke 1:19). In whose Name I approach you, in whose veracity and power I unquestioningly rely, in whose ineffable presence I am now conscious of, standing, and whom I have prayed to and obtained answer.

"There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Frightful prospect was that. From the expression, "the early and the latter rain" (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24), we gather that, normally, Palestine experienced a dry season of several months duration: but though no rain fell then, very heavy dews descended at night which greatly refreshed vegetation. But for neither dew nor rain to fall, and that for a period of years, was a terrible judgment

indeed. That land so rich and fertile as to be designated one which, “flowed with milk and honey,” would quickly be turned into one of drought and barrenness, entailing famine, pestilence and death. And when God withholds rain, none can create it. “Are there any among the vanities (false gods) of the Gentiles that can cause rain?” (Jer. 14:22)—how *that* reveals the utter impotency of idols and the madness of those who render them homage.

The exacting ordeal facing Elijah in confronting Ahab and delivering such a message called for no ordinary moral strength. This will be the more evident if we direct attention to a detail which has quite escaped the commentators—one which is only apparent by a careful comparison of Scripture. Elijah told the king, “there shall be no dew nor rain these years,” while in 1 Kings 18:1 the sequel says, “And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the *third* year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.” On the other hand Christ declared, “many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six *months*, when great famine was throughout all the land” (Luke 4:25). How, then, are we to explain those extra six months? In this way: there had *already been* a six months drought when Elijah visited Ahab: we can well imagine how furious the king would be when told that the terrible drought was to last another three years!

Yes, the unpleasant task before Elijah called for no ordinary resolution and boldness, and well may we inquire, What was the secret of his remarkable courage, how are we to account for his strength? Some of the Jewish rabbis have contended that he was an angel, but that cannot be for the New Testament expressly informs us that he was “a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17). Yes he was, but “a man.” Nevertheless, He trembled not in the presence of a monarch. Though a man, yet he had power to close Heaven’s windows and dry up earth’s streams. But the question returns upon us, How are we to account for the full assurance with which he foretold the protracted drought, his confidence that all would be according to his word? How was it that one so weak in himself became mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds?

We suggest a threefold reason as to the secret of Elijah’s strength. First, *his praying*. “Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17). Let it be duly noted that the Prophet did not begin his fervent supplications *after* his appearance before Ahab, but six months before! Here, then, lies the explanation of his assurance and boldness before the king. Prayer in private was the source of his power in public: he could stand unabashed in the presence of the wicked monarch because he had knelt in humility before God. But let it also be carefully observed that the Prophet had “prayed earnestly”: no formal and spiritless devotion was his that accomplished nothing, but whole-hearted, fervent and effectual.

Second, *his knowledge of God*. This is clearly intimated in his words of Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth.” Jehovah was to him a living reality. On all sides the open recognition of God had ceased: so far as outward appearances went there was not a soul in Israel who believed in His existence. But Elijah was not swayed by public opinion and practice. Why would he be, when he had within his own breast an experience which enabled him to say with Job, “I know that my Redeemer liveth!” The infidelity and atheism of others cannot shake the faith of one who has apprehended God for himself. It is this which explains Elijah’s courage, as it did on a later occasion the uncompromising faithfulness of Daniel and his three fellow Hebrews. He who really knows God is strong (Dan. 11:32) and fears not man.

Third, *his consciousness of the Divine presence*: “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.” Elijah was not only assured of the reality of Jehovah’s existence, but he was conscious of being in His presence. Though appearing before the person of Ahab, the Prophet knew he was in the presence of One infinitely greater than any earthly monarch, even Him before whom the highest angels bow in adoring worship. Gabriel himself could not make a grander avowal (Luke 1:19). Ah, my reader, such a blessed assurance as this lifts us above all fear. If the Almighty was with him, why should the Prophet tremble before a worm of the earth!? “The LORD God of Israel liveth before whom I stand,” clearly reveals the foundation on which his soul rested as he executed his unpleasant task.—A.W.P.

THE HOLY SABBATH.

9. *Its Opposition.*

We now turn to the least pleasant part of our subject and contemplate the attacks which have been made upon this Divine ordinance. It has been fiercely assailed both in doctrine and in practice, and this by the professed friends of the Lord as well as by His open enemies. Yet this should not surprise us, for since the carnal mind is enmity against God, that enmity ever manifests itself against whatever is of His special ordering—and the more so in proportion as His honour and glory are bound up with any particular appointment. It is at just such a point that the hostility of Satan rages most furiously, seeking with all his might and arts to stir up his subjects to overthrow the same, knowing full well that if *that* can be accomplished his own evil cause will be greatly furthered and the kingdom of darkness more firmly established in the world.

Just as in carnal warfare there are certain strategic centers—"key positions"—on which the security of the whole "line" depends, and just as such a strategic center is made the "military objective" by the opposing army, who are determined to capture it at all costs, so it is in connection with the great forces of good and evil. There are certain bulwarks (Isa. 48:12, 13) which are of vital importance, the maintaining of which is essential for the furtherance of true piety, for once *they* be captured the way is wide open for the hordes of wickedness to wreak their evil will. Such a "bulwark" is the Sabbath: on the strict observance of it depends the well-being of Church and State alike. To keep the Sabbath holy secures the blessing of the Most High, but the desecration thereof most assuredly calls down His curse upon a land and people.

After what has been pointed out in previous articles there is little need now for us to enter upon a lengthy proof that the Holy Sabbath is one of the principal bulwarks of Zion. Or that it constitutes one of the most vital of all "strategic centers" in the defenses of Truth and godliness, spirituality and morality. It is like a mighty fortress which guards the entrance to a pass that gives access to a vast industrial center: once that fortress be captured the millions of people living behind it in the cities are then at the mercy of the advancing foe. And just as in a military campaign the attacking general makes the demolition of that fortress his main aim, concentrating the strength of his forces against it, so it is in connection with Satan's fight against the kingdom of God upon earth: he knows full well that the overthrow of the Sabbath would mean for him a "major victory."

To employ a rather different figure. The blessings which God has promised unto men—blessings both temporal and spiritual—flow most freely along the particular channels which He has Himself appointed. Contrariwise, if those channels be forsaken, then the blessings will also be forfeited. Now since the Sabbath is the day which the Lord has set apart for the communication of special blessing, then it is obvious that those blessings will be enjoyed in greatest measure by those who are the sincerest and strictest in its sacred observance. This is a fact which is capable of the clearest verification. Organized Christianity has been here for 1,900 years and during that lengthy span it has experienced many vicissitudes, passing through periods of prosperity on the one hand and of adversity on the other, of light and purity and darkness and impurity, of spiritual energy and of spiritual torpor.

Now it can be plainly shown from the chronicles of history that there has been to a very striking degree an unmistakable correspondence in those periods between the observance of Sabbath sanctity and the spiritual prosperity of the churches on the one hand and the neglect of the Sab-

bath's sanctity and spiritual declension of the churches on the other. In this we may also see parallels with the varied experiences of the nation of Israel in Old Testament times—compare our article in the May, 1939 issue. While it is true that only fragments have survived the flight of time of what was recorded in the first two or three centuries A.D., yet sufficient is extant to show that in those centuries the Lord's Day was faithfully kept by His people in caves and catacombs, surrounded by every form of peril—as witness the testimonies of Eusebius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, etc. How far, then, was the state of the Church a flourishing one in those early days?

In seeking the answer to our last question it must be distinctly borne in mind that the prosperity of Christianity is not to be gauged by the esteem in which it is held by the world in general. Very much to the contrary. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). Unless that Divine pronouncement be held steadily before us we are certain to arrive at an entirely wrong answer to our inquiry. The world's hatred and opposition and not the world's love and co-operation are the surest index to the spiritual prosperity of Christianity. What the early Christians suffered at the hands of Nero and others of the Roman emperors which followed him, is too well known to need any description of ours. Thousands of Christ's followers sealed their testimony with their blood, yet despite the fierce persecution encountered, the Gospel continued to be diffused far and wide.

During the course of time Satan has resorted to a great variety of tactics in his efforts to stamp out the observance of the Sabbath, employing widely different measures and methods in his determination to choke this channel of Divine blessing. He employed a strange but effective instrument in his first onslaught. The fidelity and courage of the first martyrs evoked the deep esteem of the suffering but prospering Church. But alas—such is man—the praising of the *martyrs* soon took the place of the praising of Him who had sustained them, and ere long the places where they had suffered and the graves in which their mangled remains had been interred began to be regarded with superstitious veneration. It was not long until the *days* on which they had been martyred were regarded as comparatively sacred for their memories and were set apart as holy festivals hallowed by their death.

Not only were the virtues of the martyrs eulogized, but gradually it became popular to offer up prayers—at first *for* the souls of these Christians heroes, and later *to* the martyrs *themselves* as to a species of subordinate mediators. The efforts of the Enemy proved only too successful: the calendar of the Church soon became so filled with these "saints" days that the solitary dignity of the Lord's Day was crowded out and thus the channel of Divine blessing was choked. That holy veneration which had been accorded unto the Sabbath alone was now divided and extended to a multitude of human appointments, and even before the power of pagan Rome to suppress the public observance of the Christian Sabbath had passed away, its sole sanctity had disappeared before a legion of these spurious "holy days."

Constantine framed statutes requiring the inhabitants of cities to suspend their ordinary business and mechanics to abstain from their common labour on the Sabbath, and closed the courts of justice and all other public offices on that day—clear proof of how the early Church had been desirous to observe it. But the laws drawn up by this strange character who espoused Christianity introduced a most pernicious element: the Sabbath and the "holy festivals" of human invention were placed on the *same level*. The sequel may easily be imagined: those other "days" not being

of Divine authority quickly degraded the sanctity of the Lord's Day from its sole supremacy over the consciences of the worshippers. An attempt to raise any human innovation in matters of religion to an equality with what is of *Divine* institution inevitably results in the lowering of the Divine and in the elevation of the *human* above the Divine.

What the Scriptures designate as "will worship" (Col. 2:23) is *false worship*, devised by the depraved heart of man to minister to his corrupt inclinations—under the pretence of exalted piety. Not only is this "will worship" a false one, but in proportion as it flourishes, true worship is defiled. From the days of Constantine onwards the progress of error and departure from the Truth went on with ever accelerating pace and power, until in a short time the whole year was overrun with saints' days and festivals and the Lord's Day was entirely set aside, or where it was still professedly regarded was degraded into one of recreation, amusement and festivities, of such kinds and degrees of debasement to be too sinful and shameful to describe.

It is needless to inquire whether or not the churches flourished spiritually during that time, for God cannot be mocked with impunity. The fourth and fifth centuries A.D. witnessed a sad lowering of Christian standards: the Law was no longer faithfully enforced, the Gospel was grievously corrupted, and worship became more and more paganized. It was not long ere a faithless Christendom was made to reap what it had sown, for the judgments of God ever fall upon the ecclesiastical sphere before they reach the civil (see 1 Peter 4:17). Where the Truth is rejected professors are given up by God to believe a lie. The setting up of saints' days and the degradation of the Lord's Day paved the way for the rise of the great anti-Christian power. The Roman Catholic apostasy was both the fully developed offshoot of the evils to which we have alluded, as she was also suffered by God to assume dominion as a mark of His displeasure upon an adulterous generation.

The growth and domination of the Papacy supplied a vivid demonstration of the spiritual adversity and desolation which had overtaken Christendom, and rightly have the centuries which followed been designated "the Dark Ages." No longer was the Word of God preached to the people, no longer was the Sabbath Day kept holy, no longer was the simplicity of Christian worship observed. Priestcraft poisoned every spring and the Water of life was no longer obtainable. And where was the true Church of Christ to be found during this dark season: for even then God left not Himself without true witnesses on earth. The answer is, among the Vaudois valleys of the Alps—among that poor and despised people known as the Waldensians. No sooner did the degenerate system of Popery rise to power than the humble dwellers of the Piedmont become distinguished for their firm adherence to the standards of primitive Christianity, refusing to adopt any other rule of faith than the written Word of God, and exemplifying its precepts in their daily walk to an extent that few have done since.

Those possessing any acquaintance of Church history are familiar with the tragic but glorious sequel. The rage of Rome knew no bounds against this people who witnessed so faithfully and valorously for Christ, many of whom were given the great honour of suffering severely even unto death rather than yield to the demands of the Mother of Harlots. Even though most of their writings perished in the devastating persecution which they experienced, by which Rome strove might and main to exterminate them root and branch, yet sufficient have survived to furnish proof that the Waldensian Christians were characterized by *Sabbath observance*. In "The Noble Lesson," of date about 1100, there is not only a clear avowal of the binding nature of the Moral

Law—and consequently of the Fourth Commandment—but an enunciation of an important principle which shows their conception of the relation of the Law to the Gospel: “Christ did not change it that it should be abrogated, but renewed it that it might be better kept.”

In the Confession of Faith of the same Church, the feasts and vigils of saints are denounced as “an unspeakable abomination.” In an “Exposition of the Commandments” the following occurs, “They that will keep and observe the Sabbath of Christians, that is to say, will sanctify the day of the Lord, must be careful of four things. The first is to cease from all earthly and worldly labours: the second, not to sin; the third, not to be idle in regard to good works; and fourth, to do those things which are for the good of the soul.” And in another Confession, drawn up at a later period, the following article appears: “That on Sundays we ought to cease from our worldly labours, through zeal for God, and love towards our servants, and that we may apply ourselves to hearing the Word of God.” These notices are enough to prove that the Waldensian Church was definitely distinguished by its sacred observance of the Lord’s Day.

And what was the religious prosperity of Christianity in the Alps in those perilous times? Most pertinent is such an inquiry after what we have affirmed above. But again we must be careful not to employ a wrong standard of measurement, as we are so liable to do in a day when it is very common to estimate values wrongly. That prosperity is not to be looked for in numbers, in social prestige, or in anything which is highly esteemed among men; but rather in those *spiritual fruits* which are to the praise of God, because produced by the gracious operations of His Spirit. If to endure persecution as good soldiers of Jesus Christ without murmuring; if to suffer the acutest afflictions without wavering; if to experience continual persecution with an invincible patience and victorious faith be the marks of spiritual well-being, then the Waldensian Church certainly flourished spiritually.

“If to continue steadfast through a long agony of centuries, glorifying God in the midst of the furnace of persecution, even when it was heated seven times, maintaining still imperishable life and heavenly hope triumphant over all, be religious prosperity, that Church in the wilderness was marvelously prosperous. And if, in the midst of all its fiery trials, to strive to its power, and beyond its power, to act as a missionary Church, not only upholding its own testimony to the Truth, but striving to diffuse around it that priceless blessing, thus both continuing and extending true Christianity in spite of all the deadly efforts of anti-Christian Rome be religious prosperity, the faithful and zealous Waldensian Church was gloriously prosperous.

“The teaching of that Church pervaded the south of France and became instrumental there in winning many souls to Christ. Its living truths ran along the Rhine, communicating spiritual life to numbers, and preparing a way for future Gospel progress. Bohemia caught some rays of the sacred light, which in later age became the day-spring of heavenly brightness to suffering martyrs. The distant British Isles obtained some powerful life-germs, destined in due time to put forth a mighty and growing energy, not only for the protection of the suffering of the Waldenses themselves, but for the diffusion of Gospel Truth throughout the world. Such was the religious prosperity of the Bible-loving and Lord’s-Day keeping Waldensian Church; and no true Christian will deny that it was a kind and measure of prosperity which God alone could have given, and the world could not take away—the full amount and value of which only the Day to come will reveal” (W. M. Hetherington, to whom we are indebted for the above quotations).—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

Introduction.

The title which we have selected for this series of articles may occasion a raising of the eyebrows on the part of some of our readers. That we should designate the spiritual helplessness of fallen man a "doctrine" is likely to cause surprise, for it is certainly not so regarded or denominated in most circles today. Yet perhaps this is hardly to be wondered at: didactic preaching has fallen into such general disuse that more than one important doctrine is no longer heard from the pulpits. If on the one hand there is a deplorable lack of a clear and definite portrayal of the character of God, on the other there is also a woeful absence of any lucid and comprehensive presentation of the teaching of Scripture concerning the nature and condition of man, and such failure at either point is fraught with the most disastrous consequences. It is therefore timely, yea, urgent, to take up this neglected subject.

It is most important that people should clearly understand and be made thoroughly aware of their spiritual impotency, for thus alone is a foundation laid for bringing them to see and feel their imperative need of Divine grace for salvation. So long as sinners think they have it in their own power to deliver themselves from their death in trespasses and sins, they will never come to Christ that they might have life, for "the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." So long as people imagine they labour under no insuperable inability to comply with the call of the Gospel, they will never be conscious of their entire dependence upon Him alone who is able to work in them "all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess. 1:11). So long as the creature is puffed up with a sense of his own ability to respond to God's requirements, he will never become a beggar at the footstool of Divine mercy.

A careful perusal of what the Word of God has to say upon this subject leaves us in no doubt about the awful state of spiritual serfdom into which the Fall has brought man. The depravity, the blindness and deadness of all mankind in things of a spiritual nature are continually inculcated and emphatically insisted upon throughout the sacred Scriptures. Not only is the total inability of the natural man to obtain salvation by deeds of the Law frequently asserted, but his utter helplessness in himself to comply with the terms of the Gospel is also strongly affirmed—not indirectly and occasionally, but expressly and continually. Both in the Old Testament and in the New, in the declarations of the Prophets, of the Lord Christ, and of His Apostles, the bondage of the natural man unto Satan is often depicted, and his complete impotency to turn unto God for deliverance is solemnly and unequivocally set forth. Ignorance or misconception on the matter is therefore inexcusable.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that this is a doctrine which is now but little understood and rarely insisted upon. Notwithstanding the clear and uniform testimony of the Scriptures thereon, the actual condition of man and his alienation from God, his sinful inability to return unto Him, is but feebly apprehended and seldom heard even in orthodox quarters. The fact is that the whole trend of modern thought is in the very opposite direction. For the past century, and increasingly so during the last few decades, the greatness of man—his dignity, his development and his achievements—have been the predominant theme of pulpit and press. The anti-scriptural theory of evolution is a blank denial of the Fall and its dire consequences, and even where the Darwinian hypothesis has not been accepted, its pernicious influences have been more or less experi-

enced. Arminianism, with its postulate of the freedom of man's will unto good, has offered a fertile soil for the growth of this poisonous weed.

The evil effects from the promulgation of the evolutionary *lie* are far more widespread than most Christians realize. Such a philosophy (if such it is entitled to be called) has induced multitudes of people to suppose that their state is far different from, yea vastly superior to, the fearful diagnosis furnished in Holy Writ. Even the great majority of those who have not accepted without considerable reservation the idea that man is slowly but surely progressing have been encouraged to believe that their case is far better than it actually is. Consequently, when a servant of God boldly affirms that all the descendants of Adam are so completely enslaved by sin that they are utterly unable to take one step toward Christ for deliverance, he is looked upon as a doleful pessimist or crazy fanatic. To speak of the spiritual impotency of the natural man is, in our day, to talk in an unknown tongue.

Not only does the appalling ignorance of our generation cause the servant of God to labour under a heavy handicap when seeking to present the Scriptural account of man's total inability unto good, but he is also placed at a serious disadvantage by virtue of the marked distaste of this truth. The subject of his moral impotency is far from being a pleasing one to the natural man: he would be told that all he needs to do is exert himself, that salvation lies within the power of his will, that he is the determiner of his own destiny. Pride, with its strong dislike of being a debtor to the sovereign grace of God, rises up against it. Self-esteem, with its rabid repugnance of anything which lays the creature in the dust, hotly resents what is so humiliating. Consequently, this truth is either openly rejected, or if professedly received, it is turned to an evil use.

Moreover, when it is insisted upon that man's bondage to sin is both voluntary and culpable, that the guilt for his inability to turn unto God or do anything pleasing in His sight lies at his own door, that his spiritual impotency consists in nothing but the depravity of his own heart and his inveterate enmity against God, then the hatefulness of this doctrine will be speedily demonstrated. While men are allowed to think that their spiritual helplessness is involuntary rather than willful, innocent rather than criminal, something to be pitied rather than blamed, they may receive this truth with a measure of toleration—but let them be told that they themselves have forged the shackles which hold them in captivity to sin, that God deems *them* responsible for the corruption of their hearts, and that their incapability of being holy constitutes the very essence of their guilt—loud will be the outcries against such a flesh-withering truth.

But however repellent this truth may be to our hearers or readers, it must not be withheld from them. The minister of Christ is not sent forth to please or entertain his congregation, but to declare the counsel of God, and not merely those parts of it which may meet with their approval and acceptance, but “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). If he deliberately omits that which raises their ire, he betrays his trust. Once he starts whittling down his Divinely-given commission there will be no end to the process, for one class will murmur against this portion of the Truth and another against that. The servant of God has *nothing* to do with the response which is made to his preaching: his business is to deliver the Word of God in its unadulterated purity and leave the results to the One who has called him, and he may be assured at the outset that unless many in his congregation are seriously disturbed by his message, he has failed to deliver it in its clarity.

No, no matter how hotly this doctrine of man's spiritual impotency be resented, both by the profane and the religious world, it must not be withheld through cowardice. Christ did not. Our supreme Exemplar announced this truth emphatically and constantly. To the Pharisees He said, "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). That is, your hearts are so vile, it is utterly impossible that anything holy should issue therefrom. You can no more change your own nature by any effort of will than a leper might heal himself by his own volition. "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). It is a moral impossibility—pride and humility are contraries: those who seek to please self and those who sincerely aim at the approbation of God belong to two entirely different races.

On another occasion the Lord Christ asked, "Why do ye not understand My speech?" to which He made answer, "even because ye *cannot* hear My word" (John 8:43). There is no mistaking His meaning here and no evading the force of His solemn utterance. The message of Christ was hateful to their worldly and wicked hearts and could no more be acceptable to them than would wholesome food unto birds accustomed to feed on carrion. Man cannot act contrary to his nature: as well expect fire to burn downwards or water flow upwards. "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44), said the Saviour to the Jews. And what was their response? This, "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan and hast a demon" (v. 48).

Now if it is true that such is the case with the natural man that he can no more break the bonds which hold him in captivity to Satan than he could restore the dead to life, ought he not to be faithfully informed of his woeful condition? If it is true that he is so helpless and hopeless in himself, that he cannot turn from sin unto holiness, that he cannot please God, that he cannot take one step toward Christ for salvation, is it not the part of kindness to make him acquainted with his spiritual impotency? Does he not need his dreams of self-sufficiency shattered? Shouldn't we expose the delusion that he is lord of himself? Yea, is it not positively cruel to leave him alone in his complacency and make no efforts to bring him face to face with the desperateness of his depravity? Surely anyone with a vestige of charity in his heart will have no difficulty in answering such questions.

It is far from a pleasant task for a physician to tell an unsuspecting patient that his or her heart is organically diseased or to announce unto a young person engaged in strenuous activities that his lungs are in such a condition he is totally unfit for violent exertions. Nevertheless, it is his bounden duty to break such news to him. Now if this principle holds good in connection with our moral bodies, how much more so with regard to our never-dying spirits! True, there are some doctors who persuade themselves that there are times when it is expedient for them to withhold such information from their patients, but a true physician of souls is *never* justified in concealing the more distasteful aspect of the Truth from those who are under his care. If he is to be free from their blood, then he must unsparingly expose the plague of their hearts.

The fact of fallen man's moral inability is indissolubly bound up with the doctrine of his *total depravity*, and any denial of the one is a repudiation of the other, as any attempt to modify the former is to vitiate the latter. In like manner, the fact of the natural man's impotency to deliver himself from the bondage of sin is inseparably connected with the truth of regeneration, for unless we are without strength in ourselves, what need is there for God to work a miracle of grace

grace in us? It is, then, the reality of the sinner's helplessness which provides the dark background necessary for the Gospel, and just in proportion as we are made sensible of our helplessness shall we really value the mercy proffered to us in the Gospel. Contrariwise, while we cherish the delusion that we have power to turn unto God at any time, just so long shall we continue procrastinating and thereby despise its gracious overtures.

From what has been pointed out above the reader may begin to perceive the great practical importance of the subject which is (D.V.) to be before us. "A sense of danger excites; a sense of security puts to sleep. A company of gamblers in the sixth story are told that the building is on fire. One of them answers, 'we have the key to the fire escape,' and all continue the game. Suddenly one exclaims, 'the key is lost'; all immediately spring to their feet and endeavour to escape" (William Shedd). Just so long as the sinner believes—because of his erroneous notion of the freedom of his will—that he has the power to repent and believe at any moment, he will defer faith and repentance; nay he will not so much as beg God to work these graces in him.

The first office of the preacher is (under God) to stain the pride of all human glory, to bring down the high looks of man, to make him aware of his sinful perversity, to make his hearer feel that he is unworthy of the least of all God's mercies. His business is to strip him of the rags of his self-righteousness and to shatter his self-sufficiency; to make him sensible of his utter dependence on the mere grace of God. He only who finds himself absolutely helpless will surrender himself to sovereign grace; he only who feels himself to be already sinking under the billows of a justly-deserved condemnation will cry out, "Lord save me, I perish." Only he who has been brought to despair will place the crown of glory on the only Head entitled to wear it. Though it is a fact that God alone can make any man conscious of his impotency, yet He is pleased to use means in doing this, and that means is *the Truth*—faithfully dispensed, effectually applied by the Spirit.—A.W.P.

FAITH TO WORK MIRACLES.

During the last century there have been two cardinal errors made concerning much that is contained in the Gospels—errors which have prevailed extensively among professing Christians and which have wrought great havoc. Each of those errors concern that interpretation and application of the contents of the four Evangelists as to what does and does not pertain to the Lord's people today. The first of these errors was a *dispensational* one. The view was falsely taken that because our Lord's ministry was confined to Palestine, while the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, it was therefore exclusively "Jewish" in its character, and that the saints of our era must turn only to the Epistles of the Apostle to the Gentiles for their marching orders. Such an error is refuted by the opening verses of Hebrews (where the ministry of Christ is contrasted from that of the Prophets) and by the fact that the great division of time between B.C. and A.D. is dated from the *birth* of Christ, and not from His death or even His ascension.

The second error is a *practical* one. Here the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. In the former case an insidious and insistent attempt was made to deprive the saints of a valuable part of their legitimate heritage, taking from them needed precepts and precious promises under the pretext they were the sole property of the Jews. But in the latter case, which is now more fully to engage our attention, promises which were made *to a particular* class have been allocated universally, promises which belonged only to the Apostles and the primitive Christians have been wrongly applied to all believers in general. The result has been that false expectations were engendered, vain hopes raised, wild fanaticism encouraged—and those who have come into contact with this perversion of the Truth have seen what tragic effects followed—thousands making complete shipwreck of the faith.

No doubt it will seem to some of our friends that we are now treading on delicate ground, for to assure them that some of the promises made by Christ to His disciples, promises which numbers of our readers may have been taught are the legitimate grounds on which to rest their faith, *do not*—in their prime sense—*belong to them* at all, must prove disquieting and disappointing. We shall, therefore, proceed cautiously and slowly, and ask them to weigh with extra diligence what follows. "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In My name shall they cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17, 18). Now those are the words of the Lord Jesus, but may *we* appropriate them to-day and expect a literal fulfillment of the same? There are those who answer with an emphatic Yes, though we very much doubt if many regular readers of these pages would do so.

Now the verses just quoted respect the miracles which attended the preaching of the Gospel in the early days of this Christian dispensation, and it is to be duly noted that those miracles resulted from the exercise of *faith*. This we think will be so evident to our readers as to occasion no difficulty. But there are other passages in the Gospels dealing with the same subject—similar promises from the lips of the Saviour which may not appear so simple—and it is to them that we now turn. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). This same promise, slightly varied, is found again in, "Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). How often has this promise been appropriated by Christians and earnestly pleaded before God, only to meet with no response. Such have attributed this lack of response to the fail-

ure of their *faith*, (or been told that is the cause), instead of perceiving they were resting their faith on an unwarrantable foundation.

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). Our first concern should be to ascertain *to whom* those words were first addressed, and the circumstance which occasioned them—considerations that are usually of first importance as aids to a true application of a verse, for if the context is ignored mistakes are sure to follow. The verses immediately preceding record our Lord’s cursing of the fig tree and the effect this had upon those attending Him. Verse 20 says, “When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away.” Mark tells us, “And Peter (the spokesman of the Apostles) calling to remembrance saith unto Him, Master, behold, the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away” (11:21). Then it was that Christ replied, “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall

ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:21-22).

It must be borne in mind that at an earlier date Christ had appointed 12 of His disciples to preach the Gospel and to perform miracles in confirmation of their commission. “And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all manner of sickness” (Matt. 10:1)—those miraculous powers were primarily what Paul referred to when he spoke of, “The *signs* of an Apostle were *wrought* among you” (2 Cor. 12:12). Luke tells us that, “after these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come” (10:1), bidding them “heal the sick” (v. 9). The same duly returned and declared, “even the demons are subject unto us through Thy name” (v. 17). Thus, it is quite clear that the promise of Matthew 21:22 was made to those who were in possession of *miraculous powers* and was designed for their personal encouragement.

Before proceeding further, let it be pointed out that what we are advancing in this article is no novelty of our own devising, but rather a line of interpretation (alas, unknown to many in this superficial age) given out by many eminent servants of God in the past. For example, in his notes on Matthew 21:21, 22, Thomas Scott wrote, “When Jesus observed the surprise of the disciples He again showed them the energy of faith, with a special reference to the power of *working miracles* in His name. Whenever a proper occasion offered of performing a miracle in support of their doctrine, and they went about it relying on His power and not doubting His concurrence, they would not only be enabled to perform as wonderful works as that of withering the barren fig tree, but even the Mount of Olives, which they were then passing, might, at their word be removed and cast into the sea! That is, nothing that they undertook would be impossible for them.” So also Matthew Henry said on Mark 11:22, 23, “This is to be applied first to that faith of *miracles* which the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel were endowed with, who did wonders in things natural.”

Let us next inquire as to *the extent* of this promise: “All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Though this language be indefinite and unqualified, yet we are not warranted in drawing the conclusion that it is to be taken without any limitation. From the immediate context it is quite clear that this promise had sole respect unto the working of

miracles. Christ's object was to assure His Apostles that if they prayed in faith for any supernatural gift or power in particular, that that gift or power would be granted to them. But we have no ground for believing that if those Apostles prayed for *something different*, no matter how firm their expectation, that they would receive the same. They were not justified in extending the terms of the promise any further than was warranted by the obvious design of their Master on that special occasion.

Though the Twelve had been endowed with supernatural powers yet had they prayed for the bestowment on themselves of any temporal or spiritual blessing, there was nothing whatever in this particular promise which guaranteed an answer to any such request. Like we, the Apostles and the primitive Christians were subject to poverty, disease, and all the common trials and afflictions of this present life. We have no reason to doubt that they—for they were men subject to like infirmities as we are—prayed for their removal or mitigation, yet we know from other Scriptures that their prayers respecting these things were not always granted. This at once shows us the promise of Matthew 21:22 was not a universal one, for in that case they might have sought any temporal favours with the same faith and assurance of being heard as when they prayed that miracles should be wrought by their hands.

But let us now take note of the *proviso* which our Lord laid down: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." The same stipulation is found again in the parallel passage: "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). This promise made by Christ with respect to the working of miracles was thus conditioned upon the exercise of a certain kind of faith. If those unto whom it was made really acted out the requisite faith, then their faith absolutely secured the fulfillment of the promise. On the other hand, if they failed to put forth the faith specified, then their request was not granted. Like most of the promises in Scripture, this also was a *conditional* one.

Matthew 17 furnishes us with an illustration of the Apostles being unable to perform a desired miracle because of their failure to meet the proviso attached to the promise we are here considering. There we read of a certain man coming to Christ on behalf of his sorely-vexed son, begging the Saviour to have mercy on him, and saying, "I brought him to Thy disciples and they could not cure him" (v. 16). After the Lord had healed the demon possessed youth, His disciples asked why *they* had been unable to perform this miracle. His answer is instructive, for it definitely confirms what we have said above: "And Jesus said unto them, because of your *unbelief*: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (v. 20).

We must next inquire wherein did this faith to work miracles differ from any other kind of faith? The answer is: It rested on an entirely different foundation. In the first place, it could only be exercised by those who had been specially endowed by supernatural power to work miracles, which pertained alone to Christ's servants at the beginning of this Christian era. And in the second place, such faith had to rely implicitly upon the specific promises which Christ had made unto such, namely, that upon their counting on His assistance to enable them thereto, He would infallibly make good His word respecting the same. The same thing may be seen, as pointed out in an earlier paragraph, in the promises recorded in Mark 16:17, 18. Such were quite distinct from that faith which secures eternal life, resting upon quite another sort of promise.

In proof of what has last been said we refer to Acts 3. There we read of the beggar who had been lame from his birth asking alms of the Apostles as they were about to enter the Temple. To him Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (v. 6, and cf. "in My name" in Mark 16:17). Later, in explaining to the wondering bystanders what had happened, Peter, after charging them with delivering up the Lord Jesus to Pilate, declared that God glorified His Son adding, "and His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong" (Acts 3:16). Peter, then, had definitely acted faith upon such promises as had been given to the Apostles in Matthew 21:21, 22, and Mark 16:17, 18, etc.

Saving faith consists of the heart's appropriation of the Gospel: it is laying hold of Christ Himself as He is offered therein to poor sinners: it is trusting in the mercy of God in the Redeemer. But the faith to perform miracles could only be effectually exercised by those to whom special promises for the working of such had been given. Christ had endowed the Apostles with supernatural powers and had given assurance that He would assist them in the bringing of wondrous signs to pass for the glory of His name and the extension of His kingdom. And *that* promise of His was to be the ground of their faith. Thus, their faith had as definite and sure ground to rest upon as ours today in connection with eternal life. Nevertheless the former was vastly inferior to the latter. Judas had the one, but not the other. Hence Paul declares that it was possible in those days to have faith so as to "remove mountains" and yet be destitute of a holy love (1 Cor. 13:2).

After all that has been pointed out above it should be obvious that Christians at this day are quite unwarranted in applying such a promise to themselves in any case they feel inclined, and that ministers of the Gospel are seriously misleading their hearers when they say to them, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive them." We are fully aware that some godly but misguided preachers *have* so misapplied this text, and that some devout believers have taken this promise for themselves. Yet this is no proof that either of them were right in so doing. We have personally attended more than one "Faith-healing service" where such a promise was "claimed" by the one in charge and have witnessed the pathetic disappointment of the sick hobbling away on their crutches at the close. How many sober-minded people were led into open infidelity by such a fiasco only the Day will reveal. Perhaps some of our readers are beginning to better grasp our meaning when we say, from time to time, Many who fail to understand the *sense* of a verse are frequently misled by the *sound* of it.

(Continued in the April issue).