

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—August, 1941
THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

“Thou shalt not kill” (Exo. 20:13). In the first five Commandments we have seen how God safeguarded His own glory; in the second five we are to behold how He provides for the security and well-being of men. First, for the protection of man’s person; second, for the sanctity and good of his family: “thou shalt not commit adultery”; third, for the safety of his estate and substance: “thou shalt not steal”; fourth, for his reputation or good name: “thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” Finally, as a strong fence about the whole Law, God not only prohibits outward crimes, but inward motions of evil in our thoughts and affections: “thou shalt not covet.” It is the first of these regulations which specially relates to our neighbour that we shall now consider: “thou shalt not kill.”

This Sixth Commandment prohibits that barbarous and inhuman sin of murder, which is the firstborn of the Devil, who was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). It is the first crime we read of after the fall of Adam and Eve, wherein the corruption transmitted to their descendants was fearfully displayed by Cain: his rancour and enmity goading him to slay Abel, because his brother’s “works were righteous and his own evil” (1 John 3:12). But this Commandment is not restricted to forbidding the actual crime of murder, it prohibits all the degrees and causes of it: as rash anger and hatred, slanders and revenge, whatever may prejudice the safety of our neighbour or tempt us to see him perish when it is in our power to relieve and rescue him.

Let us begin by pointing out that every killing of a man is not murder. It is not so in the execution of justice, when the magistrate sentences a slayer, for he is vested with lawful authority to put capital offenders to death, and if he fails to do so then God will charge it upon him as his sin. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6) states the general and unchanging principle. “Thine eye shall not pity, but life shall go for life” (Deut. 19:21), is God’s order to the magistrate. Nor is the shedding of blood in a righteous war chargeable with murder. It is lawful to take up arms against an invader and to recover what has been unjustly taken away: thus David pursued the Amalekites who had carried away his wives captive. So, too, for the punishing of some great injury or wrong: David made war upon the Ammonites for their outraging of his ambassadors (2 Sam. 10).

As there are some who decry this assertion and denounce all war as unlawful in this Christian dispensation, let us point out: when soldiers came to Christ’s forerunner for instruction saying “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:14), he did not say, Fight no more, abandon your calling, but gave them directions how they should conduct themselves. When the Centurion came to the Saviour and drew arguments from his military calling, our Lord did not condemn his profession or rebuke him for holding such an office: instead, He highly commended his faith (Luke 7:8, 9). When examined by Pilate, Christ declared, “My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). Those words clearly imply that though carnal means were improper for advancing Christ’s spiritual kingdom, yet had not His state of humiliation prevented His assuming the royal sceptre, His followers might lawfully have fought to defend His title.

There is one other exception, namely, accidental slaying, which is not chargeable with murder: when life is taken without any intention of so doing. Such a case we find mentioned in

Scripture, as when hewing wood the axe should slip and undesignedly kill a neighbour (Deut. 19:5). For such innocent slayers the Lord appointed cities of refuge, where they could find safe asylum from the avenger of blood. But let it be pointed out that we must be employed about lawful things, otherwise if we are engaged in what is unjustified and it leads to the death of another, this cannot be excused from murder (see Exo. 21:22-24).

Next we consider cases of murder. Suicide is *self-murder*, and is one of the most desperate crimes which can be committed. Inasmuch as this sin precludes repentance on the part of its perpetrator, it is beyond forgiveness. Such creatures are so abandoned by God as to have no concern for their eternal salvation, seeing they pass into the immediate presence of their judge with their hands covered in their own blood. Such are self-murderers, for they destroy not only their bodies but their souls, too. The murdering *of another* is a most heinous crime. It torments the conscience

of its perpetrator with fearful affrights, so that often he gives himself up to justice. Those who are *accessory* are guilty of murder: as those who counsel it to be done (2 Sam. 12:9), or consent thereto (as Pilate), or conceal it (as in Deut. 21:6, 7, by clear implication).

This Commandment not only forbids the perpetration of murder, but likewise all causes and occasions leading to it. The principal of these are envy and anger. Envy has been well described as “the rust of a cankered soul, a foul vice which turns the happiness of others into our own misery.” Cain first enviously repined at the success of his brother’s sacrifice, and this quickly prompted him to murder. So, too, unjust and inordinate anger, if it be allowed to lie festering in the heart, will turn into the venom of an implacable hatred. Such anger is not only a cause, but it is actually a degree of murder, as is clear from the teaching of Christ in Matthew 5:21, 22.

It should be pointed out that anger is not, as envy, simply and in itself, unlawful. There is a virtuous anger, which so far from being sin, is a noble and praise-worthy grace: see Mark 3:5. To be moved with indignation for the cause of God when His glory is degraded, His name dishonoured, His sanctuary polluted, His people vilified, is a holy anger. So there is an innocent and allowable anger when we are unjustly provoked by offenses against ourselves, but here we need to be much on our guard that we “sin not” (Eph. 4:26). A vicious and sinful anger, which darkens the understanding and makes one act as in a frenzy, is one which is without cause and without bounds. Jonah 4:1 gives an illustration of a groundless anger. Immoderate anger is when it is violent and excessive, or when it continues to boil: “let not the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26)—if it does, the scum of malice will be on your heart next morning!

In closing, let us give some rules for restraining and repressing anger. 1. Labour and pray for a meek and humble spirit. Think lowly of yourself and you will not be angered if others slight you. All contention proceeds from pride (Prov. 13:10). The more you despise yourself the easier it will be to bear the contempt of your fellows. 2. Think often of the infinite patience and forbearance of God. How many affronts does He bear with from us? How often do we give Him occasion to be angry with us, yet, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins”—let this great example be ours. 3. Beware of prejudice against any, for it is sure to misinterpret their actions. Fight against the first risings of envy and anger: when injured, put it down to ignorance or as unintentional. 4. Shun angry persons (Prov. 22:24, 25): fire quickly spreads.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

19. *Anxiety Forbidden*: Matthew 6:30, 31.

“And why take ye thought for raiment?” (Matt. 6:28). As we pointed out last month, though in the form of a question—to stir up our minds and search our hearts—these words of Christ are an express prohibition. That prohibition is twofold: against inordinate care and against immoderate desire. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin” (v. 28). Here Christ bids us learn of the uncultivated flower that which rebukes our sinful distrust on the one hand and which reveals the folly of our lusting after an elaborate wardrobe on the other. The first of these lessons is inculcated by the fact that they put forth no labour in order to earn their raiment. If, then, God graciously provides for them, much more will He do so for those who faithfully use the means He has appointed that we may obtain things honest and needful. The second lesson is expressed in, “And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (v. 29). How foolish, then, to be vainglorious of our apparel when, after all our trouble and expense, it is less beautiful than that of the flowers.

“And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Wherein lies the point of contrast? Was it merely that the lily is clothed with a robe of more delicate texture and of greater beauty than any man-made fabric? We believe there is something else, something more important for our hearts, a deeper truth adumbrated therein. All of Solomon’s stately glory was but *artificial*, put on from without, whereas the adornment of the flower comes from within: theirs is no foreign drapery, but an essential part of themselves, namely, a development and result of what they really are. So should it be: so must it be, with the Christian. That life and light which God has communicated to his heart silently but surely illumines his mind, sanctifies his affections, and brings forth the fruits of righteousness. At the resurrection, that Divine life in the soul shall break through the body and envelope the whole person with splendour: “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

Ah, my reader, it is a very profitable exercise to “Consider the lilies of the field.” A spiritual meditation thereon cannot but be most instructive, for they are the handiwork of Him who is “wonderful in counsel, excellent in working.” If we “consider” and take to heart “*how* they grow,” we shall perceive that which will both humble and encourage us. Their growth is *gradual*: first the blade, then the bud, then the flower. Their growth is one of increasing *loveliness*. Is ours? Are we gradually becoming more Christlike: more meek and lowly, more gentle and unselfish? Are we really going from “strength to strength” (Psa. 84:7) and being “changed into the same image (of the Lord) from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18)? Their growth consists in an increasing development and *display of the* life with which God has endowed them. Are we so growing: making more and more manifest the principle of grace which the Holy Spirit has communicated to our hearts, “showing forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light”?

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith” (Matt. 6:30). Here is further instruction to be derived from the flowers of the field, namely, their frailty and the brevity of their life. If this be duly taken to heart by us, it will correct that carnal lusting after fine clothes. Why should we set our affections upon a lavish wardrobe, be proud of our raiment, or make the

putting on of apparel our “adornment,” when after all we cannot compete with the flowers of the field? Such childish vanity appears still worse when we remind ourselves of the evanescence of such displays. The beauty of the flowers lasts but a few short hours, for tomorrow they are withered and cast with other rubbish into the oven. And our sojourn upon earth is only for a very short span at most—then why be so proud of our clothes, which quickly lose their gloss and shape, soon wear out, and we ourselves cast into the grave?

Not only is a lusting after showy apparel here rebuked, but also anxiety about supplies of necessary clothing. In the opening “wherefore” of verse 30, Christ applies His argument unto His disciples and hearers. He enforces His prohibition in verse 28 by a contrast drawn between men and herbs of the field. The pre-eminence of man over them consists in these things: first, the herbs were made for man’s use and not man for them—besides other uses, they serve to act as fuel. Second, the herbs of the field exist today but tomorrow they are not, for being consumed they cease to be. Far otherwise is it with man, for even though his body is reduced to ashes, yet his being is not destroyed by reason of his immortal soul, which though it had a beginning yet never shall have an end. Herein he far excels them: their life arises from the matter whereof they consist and so vanishes with it, but the soul of man is a different substance from his body and perishes not when his body dies.

The vast difference between man and all the lower orders of creatures is clearly intimated by God in connection with their respective creations: God commanded the earth to “bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind” (Gen. 1:11). But when He created man, though He made his body from the dust of the earth, yet his spirit and soul were immediately from his Creator, who “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). This pre-eminence of man Christ insisted on when reproving the skeptical and materialistic Sadducees, for He pointed out that God is, “the God of Abraham,” whose body had returned to its native dust long before, yet said that, “God is not the God of the dead (that is, of those who had no being at all) but of the living” (Matt. 22:32). Now this superiority of man strongly enforces his duty to depend upon God’s care and providence without distracting anxiety, for if the Creator provides such glorious array for the mere herb, surely He will not suffer the nobler creature of His hand to go naked. This is the very conclusion which Christ here draws.

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you? O ye of little faith” (Matt. 6:30). Let us observe, first, how the Saviour here gave God His proper place and honour: He did not ascribe the loveliness of the lily to an impersonal “Nature” or the outworking of the law of its being, but expressly attributed it unto its Maker—“all the excellencies of the creature flow from God, the Fount and Spring of them” (Matthew Henry). Second, weigh well the “much more.” If Jehovah-Jireh supplies such lovely array for so short-lived and comparatively useless creatures as the herbage of the field, most certainly He will not suffer any of His own dear children to lack any good thing. Then how plainly is it their duty to cast all their care upon Him, knowing that He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7). We have a more excellent being than they: we are made for eternity, they for but a few days; we are taken into a closer and dearer relationship to God—His beloved people. Third, ponder well our Lord’s rebuke, “O ye of little faith,” which reveals what is at the bottom of our inordinate care—distrust.

“O ye of little faith”—those whom our Lord here chided were disciples, and that for which He reproved them was not a total lack of faith, but for the small measure of it, their distrust being more powerful than their confidence in God’s providence. Herein we may see how one Christian differs from another (and how the experience of the same believer varies at different times), for there are some who, like Abraham, are so strong in faith that they rely wholly on God’s promise, nothing doubting when appearances are entirely against them (Rom. 4:20). But there are others with a faith so weak, so mingled with doubts, that they are like those disciples were at this time. But however weak such faith may be, however excuseless and reproveable, yet the faith itself is a true and saving one, as appears plainly in their case, for in Matthew 6:26 Christ acknowledged these fearing disciples were God’s children by calling Him *their* “heavenly Father.”

Let us pause for a moment and point out that such weakness of faith in nowise jeopardizes our salvation, or that because we have more unbelief than faith our unbelief will have more force to condemn than our faith to save. Not so, for we are not saved *because* of our faith, though we cannot be saved without it. It is not the degree or strength of faith which renders it efficacious, but the clinging to of the *right Object*. Faith saves (instrumentally) when it lays hold of the mercy of God in Christ, and weak faith may do that just as truly, though not with such assurance and comfort, as a strong faith. The doubting and weakness which is in a “little faith” does not damn us if we bewail it and use the means for strengthening faith. None of God’s children have a perfect faith and few of them attain unto the full assurance which Abraham reached. To those of little faith we would say, Though your distrust is a burden and grief to you, comfort yourself with the blessed fact that Christ will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Isa. 42:3).

The reason why Christ chided His disciples for the littleness of their faith was because they distrusted God for raiment. They were to be blamed for this, for their heavenly Father’s care of the least of His creatures should have taught them better. Herein we may see one of the properties of saving faith. It not only lays hold of the mercy of God for the pardon of sins and of everlasting life in Christ, but it also relies on His promises for temporal blessings in this life. Does not the greater include the less: if God gives Christ to him who believes, shall He not also with Him freely give him all things? (Rom. 8:32)! All the promises of God are, “Yea and Amen in Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20), whether they respect eternal life or temporal life. Therefore the same faith which says God will pardon my sins and save my soul for Christ’s sake, will also trust Him to provide me with food and raiment while I am left here below.

Noah’s heart laid hold of the Divine promise of his preservation in the ark by the same faith whereby he was made “heir of righteousness” (Heb. 11:7). So, too, Abraham by the same faith whereby he was justified, believed God’s promise that he should have a son in his old age (Rom. 4:18). Let this point, then, be duly observed and the order remembered wherein faith lays hold of the Divine promises. It first apprehends God’s mercy in Christ and then His providential care for us. This is so obvious and simple it should need no labouring. As the Christian expects to be saved by faith after death, so he must live by faith in this world: if we rely on God’s mercy for our souls, we will also depend upon Him providing for our body, for how shall we cast ourselves upon God’s grace for Heaven if we cannot depend upon His goodness for food and raiment while He leaves us here upon earth?

It is at this point we should *make trial of* our faith: what sort it is, true or false; and the degree of it, whether it be weak or strong. Christ here plainly intimates that the more distracted we are by worldly cares the less is our belief in and reliance upon God, for distrustful anxiety over temporal things issues from unbelief in Divine providence. Thus it follows that the less we trust God for temporal things, the less do we really believe in His eternal mercies, for the selfsame faith lays hold on both. If we truly depend on God for bodily blessings in the sober use of lawful means, then we shall rest upon Him for the salvation of our souls. Such trial can scarcely be made in prosperity, when we have abundance, but if in the day of adversity we rely upon God, then is our faith genuine. But if instead, we imagine that we shall starve, and hesitate not to steal in order to supply our wants, then we have great reason to suspect that our faith is spurious.

“Therefore take no (anxious) thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed” (Matt. 6:31). Here Christ repeats the commandment which He had given against distrustful care in verse 25. The reasons for this repetition are these. First, to set an edge upon the commandment that so it may more sharply and deeply enter into our hearts, as we pointed out before. Second, to further His disciples in the exercise of faith, for by this often repetition Christ gives them occasion to meditate and think upon this duty the more frequently, whereby their faith must needs be much confirmed. It is most important that we should recognize and understand that in order to obtain or strengthen faith in our hearts, we are not to be mere passive patients, either in the reception or development of it. Increase of faith comes not from God to us as visions did to the Prophets in a dream in the night, or as the print of the seal is set into the wax, but He works this grace in His people in the use of ordinary means.

There are some professing Christians who assume the attitude that they have no responsibility in this matter: that since faith is a supernatural principle, a Divine gift, it lies entirely outside their power and province to do anything in order to obtain an increase thereof. Such fatalistic listlessness, such senseless inertia, is neither honouring to God, nor helpful to themselves. Muscles unused become flabby: faculties never exercised soon lose the strength which they do have. The way to get more faith is to put to work the measure which we already have and to use the means God has appointed. Our duty is to read daily God’s Word, to meditate thereon, to strive and lay the Divine promises on our hearts, to urge our souls to believe, to strive and fight against doubting and distrust, to give ourselves to earnest prayer for the working of God’s Spirit within us.

Concerning Christ’s commandment against distrustful care, we sought to show (when considering verse 25) how far our duty extends in the matter of securing the things needful for this life, and where it must stay. It is to extend itself unto the diligent use of lawful ordinary means to procure things needful, and there stay. There are two dangers against which we need to be constantly on our guard: atheism on the one hand, and fanaticism on the other. We are so prone to fly to extremes that much care is needed in order to strike the happy medium. While diligently using means, they are not to be relied upon to the exclusion of God: His appointment therein is to be recognized and His blessing upon them definitely and humbly sought, for no means will avail us anything except the Lord is pleased to prosper them. The most industrious labours of the farmer will produce no crop unless God sends sunshine and rain, and the most assiduous study of Scripture profits not the soul unless the Holy Spirit sanctifies it unto us.

On the other side, there must be no disdaining of means under the pretense of more fully trusting the Lord. Indolence is disobedience. Scripture says, "if any would not work neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). The farmer who prays and expects God to give him a good harvest, though he has neither plowed nor sowed his fields, would be guilty of the wildest fanaticism. The able-bodied person who is out of employment, and lazily sits down pleading the Divine promises to supply his need instead of going forth to seek work, is tempting God and not trusting Him. When he is ill, it is both the duty and the privilege of the Christian to spread his case before the great Physician, yet if he scorns to use the helps and remedies which Divine providence sets before him, he acts presumptuously and not in faith. The parent who fails to train and teach his child as the Lord enjoins, counting on Divine election to save him, is making an evil use of that precious truth.

Our duty in regard to the obtaining of temporal supplies is fully discharged when we have diligently put forth honest endeavours, used all lawful means, and humbly sought God's blessing thereon. Self-effort is then to give place to the exercise of faith, trustfully waiting upon Divine providence to prosper our endeavours. It is corroding care and distrustful anxiety that distracts the heart which Christ here forbids, and which is a spiritual disease infecting the souls of the vast majority of our fellows. As to how far the reader may be affected by this evil can be ascertained by sincerely testing himself at these points: what is it which often breaks in upon your rest so that you cannot sleep peacefully? What is it that first comes into your mind when you awake? What principally engages your thoughts throughout the day? What is it over which you take the greatest pains and which gives you most delight when you are successful? If it is the things of this world, then distrustful care infests your soul and must be striven against.

In closing, let us observe how Christ here describes this unlawful anxiety by the effects it produces in distrustful persons. That there may be no mistaking this God-dishonouring and soul-paralyzing disease, the great Physician has plainly described its symptoms. It causes its victims to ask, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "With what shall we be clothed?" These are the very complaints they make when losses are encountered, adversities befall them, supplies are apparently cut off. When those whose confidence and reliance is not in the living God lose their job, or their investments miscarry, or they are stricken with a disease which incapacitates their body, they at once cry out, What will become of us? How shall we exist? It is this which Christ is here rebuking: those unbelieving utterances (for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks!) which denote we have no faith in God's goodness and distrust His care of us. The Christian must fight against such evil thoughts and murmuring complaints, laying fresh hold on the Divine promises and assuring himself that the "Lord will provide."—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.*20. Holiness Vindicated.*

Last month we sought to make practical application unto ourselves of the prayer that was offered unto God by Elijah upon Mount Carmel. It has been recorded for our learning (Rom. 15:4) and encouragement, and many valuable lessons are contained therein, if only we have hearts to receive them. With very rare exceptions the modern pulpit furnishes little or no help on this important matter—rather are they a stumblingblock to those desirous of knowing the way of the Lord more perfectly. If young Christians are anxious to discover the secrets of acceptable and effectual prayer, they must not be guided by what they now hear and see going on in the religious world: instead, they must turn to that Divine revelation which God has graciously designed as a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path. If they humbly seek instruction from God's Word and trustfully count upon His Holy Spirit's aid, they will be delivered from that anomaly which is now called prayer.

On the one hand we need to be delivered from a cold, mechanical and formal type of praying which is merely a lip service, in which there is no actual approach unto the Lord, no delighting of ourselves in Him, no pouring out of the heart before Him. On the other hand we need to be preserved from that unseemly, wild, and fanatical frenzy which in some quarters is mistaken for spiritual warmth and earnestness. There are some who too much resemble the worshippers of Baal when they pray, addressing God as though He were deaf. They seem to regard excitement of their animal spirits and violent contortions of body as the essence of supplication. They jump about, roll themselves on the ground, shout themselves hoarse, and despise those who speak unto God in a calm and composed, meek and orderly manner. Such irreverent frenzy is even worse than formality. Noise is not to be mistaken for fervour, nor raving for devotion. "Be ye therefore *sober* and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7) is the Divine corrective for this evil.

Now we turn to and consider the remarkable sequel to the beautiful but simple prayer of Elijah. And again we would say to the reader, let us attempt to visualize the scene, and as far as we can, take our place on Carmel. Cast your eye over the vast concourse of people there assembled. View the large company of the now exhausted and defeated priests of Baal. Then seek to catch the closing words of the Tishbite's prayer: "Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the LORD God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). What an awful moment follows! What intense eagerness on the part of the assembled multitude to behold the issue! What breathless silence must there have been! What shall be the outcome? Will the servant of Jehovah be baffled as had been the prophets of Baal? If no answer follow, if no fire come down from Heaven, then the Lord is no more entitled to be regarded as God than Baal. Then all that Elijah had done, all his testimony to his Master being the only true and living God, would be looked upon as a delusion. Solemn, intensely solemn moment!

But the short prayer of Elijah had scarcely ended when we are told, "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench" (v. 38). By that fire the Lord avouched Himself to be the only true God, and by it He bore witness to the fact that Elijah was His Prophet and Israel His people. O the amazing condescension of the Most High in repeatedly making demonstration of the most evident truths concerning His being, perfections, the Divine authority of His Word, and the nature of His worship. Nothing is more amazing than this, unless it be the perverseness

of men which reject such repeated demonstrations. How gracious of God to furnish such proofs and make all doubting utterly unreasonable and excuseless. Those who receive the teachings of Holy Writ without a question are not credulous fools, for so far from following cunningly devised fables, they accept the unimpeachable testimony of those who were the eye-witnesses of the most stupendous miracles. The Christian's faith rests upon a foundation that need not fear the closest investigation.

"Then the fire of the LORD fell." That this was no ordinary but rather a supernatural fire was plainly evident from the effects of it. It descended from above. Then it consumed the pieces of the sacrifice, and then the wood on which they had been laid—his order making it clear that it was not by means of the wood the flesh of the bullock was burnt. Even the twelve stones of the altar were consumed, to make it further manifest this was no common fire. As though that were not sufficient attestation of the extraordinary nature of this fire, it consumed "the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench," thus making it quite obvious that this was a fire whose agency nothing could resist. In each instance the action of this fire was *downwards*, which is contrary to the nature of all earthly fire. No trickery was at work here, but a supernatural power that removed every ground of suspicion in the spectators, leaving them face to face with the might and majesty of Him they had so grievously slighted.

"Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice." Exceedingly blessed, yet unspeakably solemn was this. First, this remarkable incident should encourage weak Christians to put their trust in God, to go forth in His strength to meet the gravest dangers, to face the fiercest enemies, and to undertake the most arduous and hazardous tasks to which He may call them. If our confidence be fully placed in the Lord Himself, He will not fail us. He will stand by us, though none others do; He will deliver us out of the hands of those who seek our hurt; He will put to confusion those who set themselves against us; and He will honour us in the sight of those who have slandered or reproached us. Look not on the frowning faces of worldlings, O trembling believer, but fix the eye of faith upon *Him* who has all power in Heaven and in earth. Be not discouraged because you meet with so very few who are like-minded, but console yourself with the grand fact that if *God* is for you it matters not who is against you.

How this incident should cheer and strengthen the tried servants of God. Satan may be telling you that *compromise* is the only wise and safe policy in such a degenerate day as this. He may be moving you to ask yourself the question, What is to become of me and my family if I persevere in preaching what is so unpopular? Then recall the case of the Apostle, and how he was supported by the Lord in the most trying circumstances. Referring to his being called upon by that monster Nero to vindicate his conduct as a servant of Christ, he says, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and spake unto me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (2 Tim. 4:16-18). And brother-minister, the Lord has not changed! Put yourself unreservedly in His hands, seek only His glory, and He will not fail you. Trust Him fully as to the outcome, and He will not put you to confusion, as this writer has fully proved.

How blessedly this incident exemplifies *the Power of faith* and the efficacy of prayer. We have already said quite a little upon the prayer offered by Elijah on this momentous occasion, but let us call attention to one other essential feature that marked it, and which must mark ours if they are to call down responses from Heaven. “According to your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29) is one of the principles which regulates God’s dealings with us. “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). Why? Because faith has to do directly with God: it brings Him into the scene, it puts Him upon His faithfulness, laying hold of His promises and saying, “Do as Thou hast said” (2 Sam. 7:25). If you want to see some of the marvels and miracles which faith can bring to pass, read slowly through Hebrews 11.

And prayer is the principal channel through which faith is to operate. To pray without faith is to insult and mock God. It is written “the prayer *of faith* shall save the sick” (James 5:15). But what is it to pray in faith? It is for the mind to be regulated and the heart to be affected by what God has said to us: it is a laying hold of His Word and then counting upon Him to fulfill His promises. This is what Elijah had done, as is plain from his, “I have done all these things *at Thy Word*” (1 Kings 18:36). Some of those things appeared utterly contrary to carnal reason—such as his venturing into the presence of the man who sought his life and ordering him to convene a vast assembly on Carmel, his pitting himself against the hundreds of false prophets, his pouring water on the sacrifice and the wood; nevertheless, he acted on God’s Word and trusted Him as to the outcome. Nor did God put him to confusion: He honoured his faith and answered his prayer.

Once again we would remind the reader: this incident is recorded for our learning and for our encouragement. The Lord God is the same today as He was then—ready to show Himself strong on the behalf of those who walk as Elijah and trust Him as he did. Is the reader faced with some difficult situation, some pressing emergency, some sore trial? Then place it not between yourself and God, but rather put God between it and you. Meditate afresh on His wondrous perfections and infinite sufficiency: ponder His precious promises which exactly suit your case: beg the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith and call it into action. So, too, with God’s servants: if they are to accomplish great things in the name of their Master, if they are to put to confusion His enemies and gain the Victory over those who oppose, if they are to be instrumental in turning the hearts of men back to God, then they must look to Him to work in and by them, they must rely on His all-mighty power both to protect and carry them fully through the discharge of arduous duties. They must have a single eye to God’s glory in what they undertake, and give themselves to believing and fervent prayer.

“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice.” As we have said above this was not only exceedingly blessed, but also unspeakably solemn. This will be the more evident if we call to mind those awful words, “our God is a *consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). How rarely is this text quoted, and more rarely still preached upon! The pulpit often declares that “God is love,” but maintains a guilty silence upon the equally true fact that He is “a consuming fire.” God is ineffably holy, and therefore does His pure nature burn against sin. God is inexorably righteous, and therefore He will visit upon every transgression and disobedience “a just recompense of reward” (Heb. 2:2). “Fools make a mock at sin” (Prov. 14:9), but they shall yet discover that they cannot mock God with impunity. They may defy His authority and trample upon His laws in this life, but in the next they shall curse themselves for their madness. In this world

God deals mercifully and patiently with His enemies, but in the world to come they shall find out to their eternal undoing that He is “a consuming fire.”

There upon Mount Carmel God made public demonstration of the solemn fact that He is “a consuming fire.” For years past He had been grievously dishonoured, His worship being supplanted by that of Baal; but here before the assembled multitude He vindicated His holiness. That fire which descended from Heaven in response to the earnest supplication of Elijah was a Divine *judgment*: it was the execution of the sentence of God’s outraged Law. God has sworn that “the soul that sinneth it shall die,” and he will not belie Himself. Sin’s wages must be paid, either to the sinner himself or to an innocent substitute, which takes his place and endures his penalty. Side by side with the moral law there was the ceremonial law given unto Israel, in which provision was made whereby mercy could be shown the transgressor and yet at the same time the claims of Divine justice be satisfied. An animal, without spot or blemish, was slain in the sinner’s stead. Thus it was here on Carmel: “The fire of the LORD fell and consumed *the burnt sacrifice*,” and so the idolatrous Israelites were spared.

O what a wondrous and marvelous scene is presented to us here on Mount Carmel. A holy God must deal with all sin by the fire of His judgment. And here was a guilty nation steeped in evil which God must judge. Must then the fire of the Lord fall immediately upon and consume that disobedient and guilty people? Was no escape possible? Yea, blessed be God, there was. An innocent victim was provided, a sacrifice to represent that sin-laden nation. On it the fire fell, consuming it, and the people were spared. What a marvelous foreshadowing was that of what took place a thousand years later upon another mount, even Calvary. There the Lamb of God substituted Himself in the place of His guilty people, bearing their sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). There the Lord Jesus Christ suffered—the Just for the unjust that He might bring them to God. There He was made a curse (Gal. 3:13) that eternal blessing might be their portion. There “the fire of the Lord” fell upon His sacred head, and so intense was its heat, He cried “I thirst.”

“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, He is the God; the LORD, He is the God” (1 Kings 18:39). “They could no longer doubt the existence and the omnipotence of Jehovah. There could be no deception as to the reality of the miracle: they saw with their own eyes the fire come down from Heaven and consume the sacrifice. And whether they had respect to the greatness of the miracle itself, or to the fact of its having been foretold by Elijah and wrought for a special purpose; or whether they contemplated the occasion as being one worthy of the extraordinary interposition of the Supreme Being, that is, to recover His people who had been seduced into apostasy by the influence of those who were in authority, and to prove Himself to be the God of their fathers, all these things combined to demonstrate its Divine Author and to establish the commission of Elijah” (John Simpson).

“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, He is the God.” The Lord is known by His ways and works: He is described as “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.” Thus the controversy was settled between Jehovah and Baal. But the children of Israel soon forgot what they had seen and—like their fathers who had witnessed the plagues upon Egypt and the overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea—they soon relapsed into idolatry. Awful displays of the Divine justice may terrify and convince the sinner, may extort confessions and resolutions, and even dispose him to many acts of obedience, while

the impression lasts. But something more is needed to change his *heart* and convert his soul. The miracles wrought by Christ left the Jewish nation still opposed to the Truth: there must be a *supernatural work within him* for man to be born again.

“And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there” (v. 40). Very solemn is this: Elijah had not prayed for the false prophets (but for “this people”), and the sacrificed bullock availed not for them. Ah, my reader, the truth of Divine election unto salvation is a reality, and there cannot be an election without a rejection! So, too, with the Atonement: Christ died for His people, “the Israel of God,” and shed *not* His blood for reprobates and apostates. God has caused this blessed truth—now almost universally denied—to be illustrated in the types as well as expressed definitely in the doctrinal portions of His Word. The paschal lamb was appointed for and gave shelter to the Hebrews, but none was provided for the Egyptians! And, my reader, unless your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life there is not the slightest ray of hope for you.

There are those actuated by false notions of liberality, who condemn Elijah for his slaying of Baal’s prophets, but they err greatly, being ignorant of the character of God and the teaching of His Word. False prophets and false priests are the greatest enemies a nation can have, for they bring both temporal and spiritual evils upon them, destroying not only their bodies but their souls, too. To have permitted those prophets of Baal an escape would have licensed them as the agents of apostasy and exposed Israel to further corruption. It must be remembered that the nation of Israel was under the direct government of Jehovah, and to tolerate in their midst those who seduced His people into idolatry, was to harbour men who were guilty of high treason against the Majesty of Heaven. Only by their destruction could the insult to Jehovah be avenged and His holiness vindicated.

Degenerate times call for witnesses who have in view the glory of God and are not swayed by sentimentality, who are uncompromising in dealing with evil. Those who consider Elijah carried his sternness to an extreme length and imagine he acted in ruthless cruelty by slaying the false prophets, know *not* Elijah’s God. The Lord is glorious in holiness, and He never acts more gloriously than when He is “a consuming fire” to the workers of iniquity. But Elijah was only a man, true, yet he was the Lord’s servant, under bonds to carry out His orders, and in slaying these false prophets he did what God’s Word required: see Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22. Under the Christian dispensation we must not slay those who have deceived others into idolatry, for “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (2 Cor. 10:4). The application for us today is this: we must unsparingly judge whatever is evil in our lives and shelter in our hearts no rivals to the Lord our God—“let not one of them escape!”—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

8. *Its Elucidation.*

In seeking to supply solution to the problem of how one who is morally impotent can be justly held to be fully accountable unto God, before we endeavour to point out more clearly the exact nature of that impotency (what it does not and what it does consist of), we deem it necessary to further amplify the remarks made last month, wherein we pointed out that we must first throw upon this problem the light which is furnished by the relationship which exists between the Creator and the creature, between God and fallen man. Unless we follow *this* order we are certain to go wrong. It is only in God's light we can ever "see light." God inhabits eternity, man is but a thing of time. Since, then, God is both before and above man, we must start with God in our thoughts and *descend* to man, and not start with the present condition of fallen man and then seek to think backwards to God.

That upon which we must first concentrate is not the rights of man but the rights of God, the rights of God over man. The relation in which the Creator stands to His creatures makes them, in the strictest sense, His property. The Almighty has an absolute right to appropriate and control the products of His own omnipotence and will. Observe how the Psalmist ascribes the supremacy of God to the dependence of all things upon Him for their original existence. "For the LORD is a great God, and a King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (Psa. 95:3-7).

Since creation itself gives the Most High an absolute right to the disposal of His creatures, His constant preservation of them continually augments His title. To keep in being calls for the exercise of power no less than to create out of nothing. To God as Creator we owe our original existence; to God as Preserver we are indebted for our continued existence. Upon this sure foundation of creation and preservation God possesses an unquestionable and inalienable propriety in all His creatures, and consequently they are under a corresponding obligation to acknowledge His dominion. Their dependence upon Him for past, present, and continued existence makes it a matter of imperative duty to submit to His authority. From the fact that we are His property it follows that His will is our law. "Shall the thing formed say unto Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). God's right to govern us is the necessary consequence of the mutual relations existing between Creator and creatures.

The dominion of God was not adjusted with reference to man, but man was constituted with reference to it. That is to say, it pleased the Lord to appoint and institute a system of moral government, and accordingly He constituted man a moral agent, fitted to His requirements. Man was endowed with understanding, conscience, affections and will, capable of bearing the image of his Maker's holiness, of appreciating the distinctions between right and wrong, of feeling the supremacy of Moral Law. To such beings God must sustain the relation of *a Ruler*, for a moral creature is necessarily the subject of obligation. It must seek the law of its being beyond itself, the ultimate standard of its conduct must be found in a superior will to which it is responsible. Unto all created intelligences the authority of their Creator is absolute, complete and final. Thus the will of God, now expressed, is to them the sole standard of moral obligation. To deny this would be to make the creature independent.

The essential elements which constitute all true government were present when God placed man in Eden: there was competent Authority, a Rule of action proclaimed, and a suitable Sanction enforced that Rule. As we have pointed out, the relationship subsisting between God and His creatures is such as to invest Him with an absolute right to exact obedience from them. As dependence is the very condition of his being, man possessed no authority to move, to exert a single faculty, or to lose a single quality, without evoking the Divine displeasure. So absolutely is the creature the property of its Maker that it has no right to think its own thoughts or indulge its own inclinations. Moral agents must act, but their actions must be determined and regulated by the will of their Maker. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat" (Gen. 2:16): without the grant, it had been an act of *theft* for Adam to have partaken of any of them!

"A creature has no more right to act than it has power to be, without the consent of the Almighty. Dependence, absolute, complete, inalienable is the law of its existence. Whatever it performs must be in the way of obedience; there can be no obedience without an indication of the will of a ruler, and no such indication without a government. It is, therefore, undeniably necessary that to justify a creature in acting at all there must be some expression, more or less distinct, direct or indirect, of the will of its Creator. As, then, the Almighty, from the very necessity of the case, must will to establish some rule, we are prepared to inquire what kind of government He was pleased to institute" (J. H. Thornwell, 1844, to whom we are indebted for much of the above).

As we mentioned in preceding months, it was a moral government of moral creatures, who were placed under revealed Law. It was Law to which was attached penal sanction, and this in the very nature of the case. In order to enforce His authority as Ruler, in order to make manifest the estimate He places upon His Law, God determined that disobedience thereto must be visited with summary punishment—how else could God's hatred of sin be known? Since the moral conduct of a creature is to be regulated with a specific reference to God's authority, unless He suffer it to be a god—uncontrolled, independent—there must be a recognition of His right to command. The actions of a moral creature must proceed from a sense of obligation corresponding to the rights of the Ruler. But there could be no such sense of obligation unless the Law were enforced by a penal sanction, for without such the obedience of the creature would then be merely the result of persuasion rather than authority.

A precept without penalty is simply advice, or at most a request; and rewards without punishments are nothing but inducements. Had Adam and Eve been placed under such principles (which is precisely what most human government, in the home, the church, and the state, has now degenerated into) it would evidently be but a system of persuasion and not of authoritative rule. In such a case their obedience would be nothing more than pleasing themselves, following the impulse of their own desires, and not submitting to the rightful demands of their Creator, which would be acting out their own wills and not the will of the Most High. It should be quite plain to the reader that such an (inconceivable) arrangement would have vested the creature with absolute sovereignty, making it a law unto itself, entirely independent of its Maker! The essence of all morality is compliance with the will of God, not because it commends itself to our reason or is agreeable to our disposition, but simply because it *is* His will.

Now in order that the will of God may be felt as Law and produce in the creature a corresponding sense of obligation, it must be enforced by a penal sanction. Declared penalty for disobedience upholds the authority of the Creator and keeps prominently in view the responsibility of the creature: it makes clear the just supremacy of the One and the due subordination of the other. The moral sense in man, even in fallen man, bears witness to the meetness of this basic fact. Conscience is a prospective principle: its decisions are by no means final, but are only the prelude of a higher sentence to be pronounced in a higher court. Conscience derives its power from anticipations of the future. It brings before its possessor the dread tribunal of eternal justice and all-mighty power; it summons us into the awful presence of a righteous, loving, and sin-hating God. It testifies to an ultimate reward for right-doing and an ultimate punishment for wrong-doing.

“When a man of principle braves calumny, reproach and persecution, when he stands unshaken in the discharge of duty amid public opposition and private treachery, when no machinations of malice or seductions of flattery can cause him to bend from the path of integrity—that must be a powerful support through which he can bid defiance to the ‘storms of fate.’ He must feel that a strong arm is underneath him; and though the eye of sense can perceive nothing in his circumstances but terror, confusion, and dismay, he sees his mountain surrounded by ‘chariots of fire and horses of fire,’ which sustain his soul in unbroken tranquility. In the approbation of his conscience there is lifted up the light of the Divine countenance upon him, and he feels the strongest assurance that all things shall work together for his ultimate good. Conscience anticipates the rewards of the just, and in the conviction which it inspires of Divine protection lays the foundation of heroic fortitude.

“When, on the contrary, the remembrance of some fatal crime rankles in the breast, the sinner’s dreams are disturbed by invisible ministers of vengeance and the fall of a leaf can strike him with horror; in every shadow he sees a ghost, in every tread he hears an avenger of blood, and in every sound the tramp of doom. What is it that invests his conscience with such terrible power to torment? Is there nothing here but the natural operation of a simple and original instinct? Who does not see that the alarm and agitation and fearful forebodings of the sinner arise from the terrors of an offended Judge and insulted Lawgiver. An approving conscience is the consciousness of right, of having done what has been commanded, and of being now entitled to the favour of the Judge. Remorse is the sense of ill-desert. The criminal does not feel that his present pangs are his punishment; it is the future, the unknown and portentous future, that fills him with consternation. He deserves ill, and the dread of receiving it makes him tremble” (Thornwell).

Let there be no uncertainty on this point: were it possible to remove the penalty from the Divine Law we should be wresting the sceptre from the hands of Deity, divesting Him of power to enforce His just demands, denuding Him of the essential dignity of His character, reducing Him to a mere suppliant at the feet of His creatures. Alas, modern theology (if “theology” it deserves to be called) presents to men a parody of God, who commands the respect of none, who is disrobed of His august and glorious Majesty—who so far from doing His will in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth is pictured as a kindly petitioner, seeking favours at the hands of worms of the dust. Such a “God” has no powerful voice which shakes the earth and makes guilty rebels quake, but only offers entreaties which may be despised with impunity.

Unless God be able to enforce His will He ceases to be God. If He speaks with authority, resistless power stands ready to support His command.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it” (Gen. 2:16, 17). *There* was the original Command given to man at the dawn of human history. It surely was uttered in a tone which carried the conviction that it must be obeyed. “For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” There was the penal sanction enforcing the authority of the Lawgiver, the plainly announced penalty for transgression. Man was not left in ignorance or uncertainty of what would follow the forbidden act: the loss of God’s favour, the incurring of His sore displeasure, certain and inescapable destruction would be the portion of the disobedient. And that awful threat was no isolated and exceptional one, but the enunciation of an abiding principle which God has constantly pressed upon men all through His Word: “the soul that sinneth it shall die,” “the wages of sin is death.” Even when the Saviour commissioned His servants to go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature, He expressly bade them to make it known “He that believeth not shall be damned.” Such a God is not to be trifled with!

Let us digress for a moment. In view of what has been said above, the discerning reader will hardly need for us to point out to him the unspeakable solemnity, the immeasurable awfulness, the consummate folly of the course followed by the vast majority of the pulpits during the past fifty years. Even where the requirements of the Moral Law were insisted upon, its fearful penal sanction was scarcely ever pressed. It has either been flatly denied that God will consign to everlasting woe all who have trampled upon His Commandments and died impenitent of their rebellion, or else a guilty silence was maintained thereon and in its stead there was presented a one-sided portrayal of the Divine character, all the emphasis being thrown upon His love and mercy. Disastrous indeed must be the consequences of such a course, and disastrous indeed has it proved. An insulted Deity is now giving us to reap what we have sown.

A law which is not enforced by penalties will not be obeyed: true alike of God’s Law or man’s. God’s Law will exert very little restraining influence upon the unregenerate if fear of the wrath to come is not definitely before their minds: and the multitude will have little respect for the statutes of the realm once they cease to regard the magistrate with “terror” (Rom. 13:2-4). For generations past there has been scarcely anything from the pulpit to inspire fear of God, and now there is practically no fear of magistracy left. Respect for the Divine authority was not faithfully proclaimed and enforced, and now there is only a mere pretence of respect for human authority. The terrible penalty for disobeying God’s Law—endless suffering in the lake of fire—was not plainly and frequently held before the pew, and now we are beholding a miserable parody, a mere formal pretence of enforcing the prescribed penalties for violations of human laws.

During the course of the last century church-goers grew less and less afraid of the consequences of breaking God’s precepts, and the masses, even children, are now less and less afraid of transgressing the laws of our country. Witness not merely the leniency but the utter laxity of most of our magistrates in either dismissing offenders with a warning or a trifling fine. Witness not only many murderers sentenced to death “with strong recommendation for mercy,” and the increasing number of those whose capital punishment is remitted; but witness the pathetic spectacle of governments afraid to act firmly, making “appeals” and “requests,” instead of using their authority. And what we are now beholding in the civil realm is the inevitable repercussion of

what took place in the religious: having sown the wind, a righteous God is now giving us to reap the whirlwind. Nor can there be any hope of a return to law and order, either between the nations or in our civil life, until the Law of God is again given its proper place in the churches, until the authority of the Lawgiver is respected, until the penalty for breaking His Law is proclaimed.

Returning to our more immediate discussion, let it be pointed out that the Fall did not to the slightest degree cancel man's responsibility. *How could it?* Man is just as much under the authority of God now as he was in Eden: he is still as truly the subject of Divine command as ever he was, and therefore as much bound to render perfect and ceaseless obedience to the Divine Law. The responsibility of man, be he unfallen or fallen, is that of a subject to his Sovereign. They who imagine that his own willful sin has cancelled man's obligation do but evince how completely darkened is their judgment. Since God continues to be man's rightful Lord and man is His lawful subject—since He still possesses the right to command and we are still under obligation to obey—it should not be thought strange that God deals with man according to this relationship, and actually enjoins upon him an obedience to His Law though he is no longer able to render it.

No, the fall of man most certainly has neither annulled nor impaired man's responsibility. *Why should it?* It was not God who took from man his spiritual strength and deprived him of his ability. Man was originally endowed with power to meet the righteous requirements of his Maker, and it was by his own madness and wickedness he threw away that power. Does a human monarch forfeit his right to demand allegiance from his subjects as soon as they turn rebels? Certainly not: it is his prerogative to demand that they throw down the weapons of their warfare and return to their original fealty. Has, then, the King of kings no such right to require that lawless rebels become loyal subjects? We say again, it was not God who stripped man of original righteousness, for he had lost it before God passed sentence upon him, as his "I was naked" (Gen. 3:10) acknowledged. If inability cancelled man's obligation then there would be no sin in the world, and consequently no judgment here or hereafter. For God to allow that fallen creatures are absolved from loving Him with all their hearts would be to abrogate His government.—A.W.P.

INWARD IMPRESSIONS.

This is a subject which is rarely touched upon today, yet in certain quarters especially there is a real need that it should be dealt with. By inward impressions we have reference to some passage of Scripture or some verse of a hymn being laid upon the mind with such force that it rivets the attention, absorbs the entire inner man and is accompanied by such an influence, that the partaker thereof is deeply affected. For example: a person may have lived a most godless life, utterly unconcerned about spiritual things and eternal interests, when suddenly (perhaps while he was indulging the lusts of the flesh, his thoughts being entirely occupied with carnal objects), there sounded in his conscience the words, "Be sure your sin will find you out." So forcibly is he impressed, it seems as though someone must have audibly uttered those words, and he turns to discover the speaker, only to find he is alone. So deep is the impression, he cannot shake it off, and he is convicted of his lost condition and made to seek the Saviour.

No doubt each one who reads the above paragraph has heard or read some such case, perhaps many like it. And quite possibly a number of our readers are distressed in that there has been nothing in their own experience which corresponds thereto, and because there is not, they greatly fear they have never been truly converted. But such an inference is quite unwarranted. God does not act uniformly in the work of regeneration, any more than He does in creation or in providence; and we have met many who never had any such experience as we have described above, yet whose salvation we could not doubt for a moment. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Sometimes the wind blows with great velocity, at other times very gently and almost imperceptibly. But how foolish I would be if, seeing the leaves moving in the breeze, I denied the wind was blowing at all, merely because it came not with hurricane intensity!

The blowing of the wind is to be ascertained by the effects produced. Necessarily so, for the wind is invisible. But though the wind be invisible, the *results* it produces are not so: they can be seen and felt, and it is by the breeze on our face and the stirring of the leaves that we perceive its actions, even though trees are not being uprooted thereby. "So is everyone that is born of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is invisible, yet His presence may be ascertained by the effects which He produces. Sometimes He comes to a soul as it were in gale force, striking terror into the heart and carrying everything before Him: sweeping away the refuge of lies in which we were sheltering, tearing down our self-righteousness at a single stroke, and bowing us in conscious fear and conviction before Him. Thus it was in the case of Saul of Tarsus. But He does not always act thus—to other souls He comes as the gentle dove, so that His operations are imperceptible at the time, like the cases of Nathanael and Lydia.

A gardener sows his seed and for a while knows not whether his effort is going to meet with any success. He scans his ground, but as yet sees no results. Perhaps he begins to worry, fearing that his soil is unsuited to such vegetables or flowers. But a little later his fears are dispelled: the appearing of green shoots above the earth is the proof that his seed has germinated. Here is one deeply exercised about his state. He has sat under the preaching of some faithful servant of Christ and has sought to appropriate unto himself the Word of Life. But into what kind of soil (heart) has that Seed found abode? Is he but a wayside, a stony, a thorny, or a good-ground hearer (Matt. 13)?—*that* is the question which causes him so much concern. And rightly so, for

there are very few good-ground hearers. And *how* is his problem to be solved? How is he to make sure whether he is a good-ground hearer? By the *results*, the fruits produced in his life.

But to return more directly to the point of inward impressions. After reading the last three paragraphs, probably some are inclined to say, Until I experience something like what you describe in the opening paragraph I shall be afraid to regard myself as genuinely converted: I must be sure that the Gospel has come to me not “in word only, but also *in power* and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5). A very wise decision, my friend. But *how* are you going to determine whether the Gospel has come to you “in power and in the Holy Spirit?” By your senses? By your emotions? By some sentence of Scripture being deeply impressed on your mind? *That* is not the right way of ascertaining. It is easy to be deceived at this point, for Satan can deeply impress the mind and stir the emotions, and when it serves his purpose employ the very words of Scripture, as he did when tempting the Saviour Himself. No, it is by some other, some surer way than that, you must determine your spiritual state.

Whether or not the Gospel has come to me “in power and in the Holy Spirit” is to be ascertained by *the effects produced in me*: not transient effects, but permanent; not simply in my consciousness, but in my life. If the Gospel has come to me “in power,” it has made me realize that I am a lost sinner—guilty and undone—it has made me realize that I can do nothing to save myself, nothing which can win God’s favour. If the Gospel has come to me “in power,” it has shut me up to Christ! It has not only revealed my dire need of Him, but has shown me how perfectly suited He is to my case, and how ready and willing He is to cleanse me from my sins and to heal my wounds. If the Gospel has come to me “in power,” it has made me come to Christ as an empty-handed beggar, casting myself on His mercy, and closing with His gracious offer to receive and by no means cast me out. If I have done this, it matters not an iota whether some particular verse of Scripture has been deeply impressed on my mind or not.

In the same way we may arrive at a well-grounded assurance of our acceptance with God. There are some who can testify that for a long season they remained in Doubting Castle, wondering whether they were the children of God or whether they were not. When suddenly the Lord spoke those words to their troubled souls, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” That text came to them with such sweetness and power, that their soul was quite melted down and all their fears were removed. But there are many gracious souls who have never shared this experience: no specific verse of Scripture has been impressed upon them, discovering that they are the Lord’s. Are we then to assume, must *they* conclude, that the absence of such an experience is proof they are yet in a state of nature? By no means. Yea, we go further: a Scripturally grounded assurance must rest upon a surer foundation than that, one that is less variable and more durable.

However powerfully a verse may be impressed on the mind, that impression will gradually fade. However sweet and melting may be the accompanying effect, it will not remain with us. Frames and feelings are but evanescent, and *Satan may be the inspirer of them*. The Scriptural method for obtaining assurance is for us to prayerfully and impartially examine and test ourselves by the Word of God, to see whether or not we bear in ourselves those marks by which God’s children are described and may be identified: such as mourning over sin, hungering after righteousness, grieving over unbelief, longing for conformity to Christ’s image, separation from the world, walking in the way of God’s commandments, distrust of self, praying daily for Divine grace. “The testimony of an enlightened conscience, judging by the Word of God, and deciding

in our favour, that by His grace we have been enabled to take up the yoke of Christ, is in some respects a more satisfactory evidence that we are His and He is ours, than if an angel were sent from Heaven to tell us that our names are written in the Book of Life" (John Newton).

But let us not be misunderstood about what we have said above. Most certainly we do not deny that many of God's people have had verses of Scripture powerfully impressed upon their minds, nor is it our purpose here to discount the value and comfort of such an experience. No; rather do we desire to point out the tendency of many to ascribe a greater virtue to them than they justly possess, and to warn against some of the dangers attaching thereto. We have met those who attributed more importance to inward impressions than they did to outward walking in God's precepts—who would rather have a verse of Scripture laid with power on their mind than to have its spiritual meaning opened to their understanding—who placed a higher value on the comfort they received from some promise being spoken to them than they did of grace being given to deny self, take up the cross and follow Christ outside the camp.

If you ask some professing Christians, who are thoroughly carnal and worldly, what is the ground of their hope for eternity, they will tell you they have no fear of the judgment to come because at such and such a time a certain Scripture was "given to" or "spoken to" them, and on that impression they rest, without knowing anything personally and experimentally of the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit. We have no hesitation in saying that such people have been misled by their own deceitful hearts, or deluded by Satan posing as an angel of light. On the other hand, were we to approach some, whom charity requires us to account regenerated persons, yet who are altogether lacking in assurance and full of doubts, and inquire of them the ground of such fears about their state, they would answer, "I never have had a Scripture promise applied to me as other Christians have, and therefore I must conclude that I am not an heir to God's promises." These poor souls need to be taught the way of the Lord more perfectly.

That which we wish to particularly press upon the reader is the vital importance and imperative necessity of his faith resting upon a sure foundation: that sure foundation is the *Word of God* and not any painful convictions or happy feelings we may have experienced; not resting on some deep impressions on our mind of some passage of Scripture, but on the Scripture itself. It is not a question of how complete a discovery has been made to me of the plague of my heart or how utterly vile I see and feel myself to be, but have I really taken the place of a sinner before God which matters the most. It is not do I sufficiently feel my need of Christ or do I clearly enough discern His excellencies and suitability to my case, but have I betaken myself to the sinner's Saviour and received Him as my own by a childlike faith? Nor is it the degree or strength of faith which renders it efficacious: no matter how weak it is, if it clings to *the right Object* it is sufficient.

Not only is there the danger of being deceived by Satan, and of resting our faith on a wrong foundation, but those who prize so highly these inward impressions generally turn for comfort to a fickle source. Even former experiences of God's kindness and present marks of grace within the soul, while good in their place, are like marks on a sundial, which say nothing in a cloudy and dark day, say nothing when the sun shines not. If we would have our comfort rest on a solid and unchanging foundation, we must betake ourselves to immediate and direct *believing*, making Christ and His righteousness the sole ground of our peace. Happy feelings and evidences of grace are to be made matters of comfort only as they are agreeable to the unerring rule of God's

Word and as the Spirit breathes upon us, and by that Word in our heart bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

The tendency to draw a false inference from the absence of such inward impressions has been mentioned above, but let us now enlarge a little thereon. It is highly probable that God often withholds the sealing testimony of His Spirit from some souls, not because they are yet in a state of nature, but because they make *an idol* of comfortable feelings. The only sure ground of faith is the Word of God and the Truth there spoken, and not our feelings. Comfortable feeling is not to be expected before we believe the Word of promise. If we have any feeling of God's love before our believing of His love, then we shall be foolish enough to build our faith upon transient frames and influences. Many *do* go wrong at this very point and build their faith on *feelings* of God's love rather than upon what He has said, and as their feelings constantly fluctuate so does their faith. This is the reason why there is no stability in such: on the mountain-top one day, in the slough of despond the next.

God is jealous, and therefore does He often withhold the comforts of His Spirit until we give Him the glory of His Truth by believing His love as it is revealed in the Scriptures. The woman with the issue of blood had no sensible feeling of virtue coming from Christ until she touched the hem of His garment (Luke 8:43-48). Grieve not if a sense of the plague of your heart keeps you poor and needy, empty and humble: Christ and His fullness will then be the more precious. Remember it is God's way to *humble* before He exalts. Not only has the Lord "heard the desire of the *humble*," but the assurance is given, "Thou wilt establish their heart" (Psa. 10:17 margin). Blessed indeed is that promise, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people" (Psa. 113:7, 8)—a promise which belongs to no wealthy, puffed up, and self-satisfied Laodicean.

God's way of bringing home His promises to the hearts of His people varies considerably. If you are able to plead a promise and make it a matter of prayer before God, that is much to be thankful for. If the promise comes not to you, go you to the promise of the Word and carry it to the Throne of Grace. Say to the Lord, Here is a promise which is suited to my case: may it please Your gracious Majesty to set it on my heart to my comfort. Depend more on the promise itself than on any felt power and sensible influence in which it may come to you: the latter may vary, the former remains unchanged. God is most glorified when we go *out of ourselves* and rely wholly on what He is in Himself. Faith is strongest and healthiest when we live on bare promises without the supports of sense. Give God the credit for His veracity. Seek rest not in the streams of blessing and comfort, but in the Fountain.

When a looking and waiting for these inward impressions becomes the rule of duty, the ground of faith, and the foundation of comfort, the Word of God is grievously slighted, if not altogether set aside. A Divinely-given faith answers or responds to God's faithfulness in the promise, just as it stands in the written Word, without expecting or looking for any further confirmation of the warrant of faith. But a faith which answers to something other than the bare Word of God—to some impressions of it on the mind with light and power—is a fanciful faith, for it makes these impressions and feelings the ground and warrant of believing. How justly may God deliver up to delusion those who make an idol of their feelings and refuse to rest directly on that Word of Truth in which alone the Divine faithfulness is pledged.

A Divinely-given faith perceives the naked promise of God, as it is proclaimed in the gracious call and free offer of the Gospel, to be a sure and sufficient foundation for faith to rest upon, without any powerful impressions of it on the mind. If such impressions and comforts *are* given, they are not looked upon as affording any better warrant or surer title to believe the promise than they had before, nor do the possessors of such faith regard impressions and feelings—no, not even if they are still further brought before them in a vision or dream—as rendering the promise more sure of accomplishment than it was previously as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. A faith which will not rest on God's bare promise, which dare not meddle with it as it stands in the written Word until it has additional warrant from inward impressions, is a fanciful and worthless faith.

A Divinely-given faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God; whereas a faith which has impressions for its foundation and comfortable feelings for its object, stands in the wisdom of the author of such impressions and feelings, whom we greatly fear is in many instances an *evil spirit*, who finding other methods unsuccessful transforms himself as an angel of light that he may delude the unwary. Satan is determined to be worshipped in one way or another, and if he cannot secure our homage through the grosser baits by which he catches others, he will make use of our convictions and emotions. When any impression of which he is the author is *rested in*, he has gained his object and attained his desire. It matters not to him whether wood or iron, silver or gold, or happy frames be our idol, so long as it *be our idol*.

A Divinely-given faith will honour God and His Word without impressions, comfortable feelings, or even the endorsement of reason—yea, *against* the dictates of reason. Such was the faith of Abraham, the father of all them that believe. For when God promised him a son in his old age, he “considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:19, 20). Such is the faith of God's elect: not merely a fair-weather commodity, but a supernatural grace which surmounts the storm. But a faith which rests on impressions is extinguished as soon as the impression wears off: such a faith fails its possessor in the cloudy and dark day, for its foundation is but a sandy and shifting one. Then look well, my reader, to your faith: to its origin, to the foundation it rests upon, to its enduring power.—A.W.P.

N.B. How striking and blessed is it to observe the course followed by the Lord Jesus when He was tempted of Satan. Just previously an audible voice from Heaven had witnessed to His Divine Sonship, yet when the Devil assaulted Him, saying, “If Thou be the Son of God,” how did He repulse the Enemy's attack? Not by saying, “I know that I am the Son of God because I have recently heard the voice of My Father testifying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ ” No, He did not: instead, He had recourse to the written Word alone, saying, “It is written.” “It is written again,” “It is written!” And this, dear reader, was recorded for *our* instruction. Here, too, the Saviour has left His people an example that they should follow His steps.

MINISTERIAL DIRECTIONS.

Permit me to give you a few hasty thoughts on the great work of the ministry, and may the Lord the Spirit be pleased to set them home with power on your heart. You have now put your hand to the plow; never think of turning or looking back, but seek with all diligence and perseverance after those things that are necessary to qualify you for the discharge of that momentous work whereunto you are called. I recommend you to be very diligent in reading the Scriptures: they are the store-house from whence you must draw all your materials for building God's house. Get well acquainted with the leading doctrines of grace, and endeavour to see all originate from the everlasting love and purpose of the Almighty. Get as clear views as possible of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, that the foundation may be rightly laid, for herein lies the masterpiece of wisdom.

Be deeply impressed with this truth: that success lies not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God; that there must be another Teacher besides you, if any work be done to purpose. Presume not upon supernatural assistance, lest you run into enthusiasm. It is easy to say, "I will trust in the Lord," at the time, which is no better than a cloak for idleness and want of due preparation. I could wish you to be rather timorous and backward to pulpit-duty, than bold and forward; the one is a sign of humility, the other of pride and self-sufficiency, especially in a young minister. There are none more fearful than the able, none more bold than the unworthy. Come, after much private prayer, into the pulpit.

This I look upon as a good method. Let your subject-matter be proposed in a clear and distinct manner: three or four particulars are sufficient to be spoken on. It has been a fault long among some ministers to run into a great number of divisions and sub-divisions. Two or three texts well chosen for confirmation of any point of doctrine are better than twenty; the former can be easily remembered, the latter perplexes the audience. Let your applications be short and pithy, and let them be used after each particular head—which I think is better than reserving all to the conclusion of your discourse. Advance nothing positively that you have not a full experience of in your own heart: what comes from the heart of the speaker, goes to the heart of the hearer. If you go out of your depth, by authority of Scripture only, let it be proposed with modesty.

Affect not pompous but plain language, and beware of showing the pedant. Human learning is a good handmaid to religion, but let it keep its proper place. Avoid all personalities in your sermons, and when you would, reprove a sinner, pull down self-righteousness, expose a hypocrite or any other that is displeasing to God—search for such characters in His Word and show the danger of such—and conscience and the Holy Spirit will make the particular application. The same will hold as to mourners, the tempted, the backslider, and the believer. There is not a possible case for a man to be in but its parallel may be found in Scripture.

If you should be warmed with your subject, let your zeal be according to knowledge, and arise from the weight of your subject. Beware of passionate and angry expressions, for the wrath of man never did work the righteousness of God. In a word, when you are discharging the work of your ministry look upon yourself as an instrument, a mere voice, and be willing that others should consider you in the same manner. This will bring you into an habitual dependence upon Almighty God for His blessing, that He will give you success.

Let all you say in public be confirmed by a modest, pious, and humble deportment in life and conversation: and your people will love you, will pray for you, and profit under your ministry.

May we and ours obtain the repentance of Peter, the faith of Paul, the love of John, and be kept humble at the foot of the Cross, till we are called to join the heavenly choir.—John Thornton, 1784.

