

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—January, 1941
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

During the past nineteen years we have written quite a number of articles on the Moral Law, nevertheless we feel constrained to devote the cover-page pieces throughout 1941 (if the Lord permits) to a consideration of the Divine Decalogue. Some of our reasons for so doing are as follows: because of the great importance which God Himself attaches to the same; because we are fully persuaded that there cannot possibly be any solidly grounded hope of a genuine revival of godliness among believers and of morality among unbelievers until the Ten Commandments are again given their proper place in our affections, thoughts, and lives; because some of our friends have requested us to do so; and because quite a number of our readers have been erroneously taught thereon—some by “Dispensationalists,” others by “Antinomians.”

There are two things which are indispensable to the Christian’s life: a clear knowledge of duty, and a conscientious practice of the same corresponding to his knowledge. As we can have no well-grounded hope of eternal salvation without obedience, so we can have no sure rule of obedience without knowledge. Although there may be knowledge without practice, yet there cannot possibly be practice of God’s will without knowledge. And therefore that we might be informed what we ought to do and what to avoid, it has pleased the Ruler and Judge of all the earth to prescribe us laws for the regulating of our actions. When we had miserably defaced the Law of nature originally written in our hearts, so that many of its commandments were no longer legible, it seemed good unto the Lord to transcribe that Law in the Scriptures, and in the Ten Commandments we have a summary of the same.

Let us first consider *their promulgation*. The manner in which the Decalogue was formally delivered to Israel was very awe-inspiring, yet replete with valuable instruction for us. First, the people were commanded to spend two days in preparing themselves, by a typical cleansing from all external pollution, before they were ready to stand in the presence of God (Exo. 19:10, 11), teaching us: that serious preparation of heart and mind must be made before we come to wait before God in His ordinances and receive a word at His mouth; and that if Israel must sanctify themselves in order to appear before God at Sinai, how much more must we sanctify ourselves that we may be meet to appear before God in Heaven. Next, the mount on which God appeared was to be fenced, with a strict prohibition that none should presume to approach the holy mount (19:12, 13), teaching us: that God is infinitely superior to us and due our utmost reverence and intimating the strictness of His Law.

Next we have a description of the fearful manifestation in which Jehovah appeared to deliver His Law (Exo. 19:18, 19), designed to affect them with an awe for His authority and to signify that if God were so terrible in the *giving* of the Law, much more will He be so when He comes to judge us for its violation. When God had delivered the Ten Words, so greatly affected were the people that they entreated Moses to act as a days-man and interpreter between God and them (20:18, 19), denoting that, when the Law is delivered to us directly by God it is (in itself) the ministration of condemnation and death, but as it is delivered to us by the Mediator, Christ, we may hear and observe it: see Galatians 3:19, 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2. Accordingly, Moses went up into the mount and received the Law, inscribed by God’s own finger upon two tables of stone, signifying that our hearts are naturally so hard that none but the finger of God can make any impression

of His Law upon them. Those tables were broken by Moses in his holy zeal (Exo. 32:19), and God wrote them a second time (34:1), prefiguring the Law of Nature written on our hearts of creation, broken when we fell in Adam, re-written in our hearts at regeneration (Heb. 10:16).

But some may ask, Has not the Law been fully abrogated by the coming of Christ into the world? Would you bring us under that heavy yoke of bondage which none has ever been able to bear? Does not the New Testament expressly declare that we are not under the Law, but under Grace? that Christ was made under the Law to free His people therefrom. Is not an attempt to over-awe men's conscience by the authority of the Decalogue a legalistic imposition, altogether at variance with that Christian liberty which the Saviour has brought in by His obedience unto death? We answer: so far from the Law being abolished by the coming of Christ into this world, He Himself emphatically stated, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets (the enforcers thereof): I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17, 18). True, the Christian is not under the Law as a Covenant of Works nor as a ministration of condemnation, but he is under it as a rule of life and a means of sanctification.

Their uniqueness. This appears first in that this revelation of God at Sinai—which was to serve for all coming ages as the grand expression of His holiness and the summation of man's duty—was attended with such awe-inspiring phenomena that the very manner of their publication plainly showed that God Himself assigned to the Decalogue peculiar importance. The Ten Commandments were uttered by God in an audible voice, with the fearful adjuncts of clouds and darkness, thunders and lightnings and the sound of a trumpet, and they were the only parts of Divine Revelation so spoken—none of the ceremonial or civil precepts were thus distinguished. Those Ten Words, and they alone, were written by the finger of God upon tables of stone, and they alone were deposited in the holy ark for safe keeping. Thus, in the unique honour conferred upon the Decalogue itself we may perceive its paramount importance in the Divine government.

Their springs, which is love. Far too little emphasis has been placed upon their Divine preface: "And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Whatever of awful grandeur and solemn majesty attended the promulgation of the Law, nevertheless it had its foundation *in love*, proceeding from God in the character of their gracious Redeemer as well as their righteous Lord, which of course embodied the all-important principle that redemption carries in its bosom a conformity to the Divine order. We must then recognize this relation of the Decalogue, as well in those who received it as in Him who gave it, to the grand principle of love, for only thus could there be a conformity between a redeeming God and a redeemed people. The words at the close of the Second Commandment, "showing mercy unto thousands of them *that love Me* and keep My commandments," make it crystal clear that the only obedience which God accepts is that which proceeds from an affectionate heart. The Saviour declared that the requirements of the Law were all summed up in loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbours as ourselves.

Their Perpetuity. That the Decalogue is binding upon every man in each succeeding generation is evident from many considerations. First, as the necessary and unchanging expression of God's rectitude, its authority over all moral agents become inevitable: the

character of God Himself must change before the Law (the rule of His government) could be revoked. It was the Law given to man at his creation, from which his subsequent apostasy could not relieve him. The Moral Law is founded on relations which subsist wherever there are creatures endowed with reason and volition. Second, Christ Himself rendered unto the Law a perfect obedience, thereby leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. Third, the Apostle to the Gentiles specifically raised the question, "Do we then make void the Law through faith?" and answered, "God forbid: yea, we establish the Law" (Rom. 3:31). Finally, the perpetuity of the Law appears in God's writing it in the hearts of His people at their new birth.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

16. *Covetousness Corrected*: Matthew 6:19, 21.

For the benefit of new readers it seems desirable that we review the ground covered in our last article on this same passage, yet old friends should not demur against this for there is much more in these verses than we then had space to deal with. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). Let it be borne in mind that when our Lord uttered these words there were no such things as banks or government security-bonds, that the rich were chiefly distinguished by their costly wardrobes, hoards of precious metals and jewels. Nevertheless, modern life affords no real guarantee of protection: it is still true that "riches certainly make themselves wings: they fly away as an eagle" (Prov. 23:5). All happiness of a worldly sort is evanescent: all carnal enjoyments are perishable in themselves: all earthly possessions are liable to theft.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." It should be pointed out that there is no sin in the possessing of a considerable amount of earthly riches, providing they are come by honestly. God greatly prospered Abraham in temporal things, yet He reminded him, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). Job was the owner of vast herds and flocks, and though for a season he was without them, yet, "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses" (Job 42:12). So, too, David was permitted to acquire an immense amount of material wealth, yet he regarded not his "treasure" as being in this world. On the contrary he was sharply distinguished from worldlings, who had "their portion in this life," declaring, "as for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Psa. 17:15). It is just as true that it is the Lord who "giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18), as it is that He alone enriches the soul spiritually.

What, then, is it which Christ here prohibits, when He says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth?" Why, He forbids us making material things our chief concern, either in the pursuit or in the enjoyment of them. He forbids us either seeking or expecting our ultimate happiness in any earthly object. He forbids us setting our affections on anything seen and temporal, with the fond imagination that it is capable of satisfying the heart. It is not sinful for a man to seek after the necessities of life, either for his present or future use, but it is wrong for him to give way to a spirit of covetousness and strive after worldly wealth without moderation. "Let us therefore thankfully receive and lawfully enjoy that portion of this life which our Father in Heaven is pleased to bestow upon us, but let us not set our affections upon them" (John Brown).

In the above commandment Christ condemned those who seek principally after worldly goods, disparaging and disregarding the true riches. This is clear from the opposition made in the next verse, where, "lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven," is placed over against, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." Such was the sin of Esau, who is termed a "profane person" because he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. So, too, Christ here condemned those who put their trust and confidence in the worldly things they amass, for this is idolatry of the heart. In like manner He here reprehended the making of earthly riches our chief good and delight for He warns us that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Christ also condemned the selfish practice of laying up for ourselves only, without regard to using the same to the glory of God

and the good of our generation, which is a grievous betrayal of our stewardship. Each of us will yet be called upon to render an account unto God.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal.” In the second part of this verse Christ enforced His commandment with reasons drawn from the corruptibility and uncertainty of worldly possessions. Therein He shows us the vanity of the creature, both in respect of its nature and of its abuse. Be the creatures ever so pure and costly, as gold and silver, furs and silks, yet are they subject to either rust or the moth. No matter how carefully they be tended, yet the thief may come and seize them. If it be asked from where comes this vanity of the creature? The answer is, God has subjected them unto it from the Fall of man (Rom. 8:20), to let us see the grievousness of our sin and the greatness of His anger upon it, by imprinting the stamp of His wrath on the creature. Hence, when we see a moth upon our garments or rust upon our silver, we ought to be humbled over our original apostasy and taught to hold the creature with a light hand.

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:20). This was only another way of saying, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (John 6:27). Instead of setting our affections upon and spending our strength in the acquirement of the perishing things of time and sense, we should desire and seek our happiness in spiritual and Divine objects which are incorruptible and eternal. Our real blessedness lies in a knowledge of God, a conformity to His image, a walking in His ways, a communing with Him: then shall we have a peace and joy which the creature can neither impart nor take from us. Men are ever seeking a safe place in which they may deposit their treasures, only to find that no place and no thing in this world is secure. If, then, we would have our treasure where no marauder can reach it, it must be hid in Christ with God (Col. 3:3).

Let us consider five things in connection with this laying up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. First, the *finding* thereof. We can neither obtain nor make use of the great Treasure until it is located. This consists of God’s revealing of it to us—for like Hagar of old (Gen. 21:19) we are blind thereto until He opens our eyes to see it; giving us to perceive our deep need of it for until He does so we are self-complacent; and making us feel we are poor without it—for until He does so we are like the Laodiceans; “rich and increased with goods” in our own esteem. Not till then do we seek God in Christ with all our hearts. It is here we must examine and test ourselves: have we been made to realize our wretchedness and want: our filthiness and guilt, our deep need of cleansing and pardon? If so, are we truly hungering and thirsting after Christ’s righteousness?

Second, having found this great Treasure, as it is exhibited in the Gospel and revealed in the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must *highly prize* and value it, above all that we have or desire, regarding it as worth far more than the whole world. Such we find was Paul’s estimate of this Treasure: “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8). The rating of Christ so highly is absolutely necessary if we are to lay Him up for our “treasure.” Here, too, we must honestly and diligently test ourselves. Can we truly say with David, “Whom have I in Heaven but Thee! and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee” (Psa. 73:25)? Does the general tenor of our lives bear witness to the fact that we value spiritual things

above all else? Is it true of us that, "The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver . . . I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psa. 119:72, 127)?

Third, having discovered this Treasure and perceived its inestimable worth, we must strive to obtain the same and *make it our own*. As said the wise man, "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5). We are required to use the means which God has appointed for this purpose, which are hearing, reading, praying, exercising faith. In His written Word and preached Gospel, God's two hands do, as it were, hold out to us this heavenly Treasure and all spiritual blessings, and our faith is the hand of the soul reaching out to receive, and by our prayers we testify our faith.

Fourth, having obtained this Treasure we must *labour to assure* it unto ourselves. To this end we must follow Paul's charge to rich men: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:17-19). By trusting in the living God, and then by giving liberally unto the needy, we "lay up in store a good foundation." Are we saved, then, by performing such good deeds? No, for the ground of our salvation Godwards is in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11); but in our own conscience, for assurance of our interest in Christ, the fruits of faith and the works of love are our evidences. "We know that we have passed from death unto life *because* we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). Compare 2 Peter 1:10 and interpret the "give diligence" by verses 5-7.

Fifth, being assured that this Treasure is ours, we must use the same as a treasure. This means that since Christ is in Heaven our hearts are to be there too, and if our affections be set upon Him in desire and delight then our behaviour will be spiritual and heavenly. If our souls be earthbound and our affections set wholly or even principally on the things of time and sense, then Christ is not our "treasure" at all. To use our Treasure aright means that we turn our earthly goods into heavenly substance, which we do when we truly employ them to the glory of God and the good of our fellows. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17). The merciful man, then, hath the Lord for his Debtor, for He sends the poor man as His messenger unto the rich, to borrow of him such things as the poor man lacketh; and the Lord's return of payment is in heavenly and spiritual blessings.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall (affording protection), in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:10, 11). What a contrast is here presented between the use which the godly and the godless make of their respective "treasures," and how often we see it illustrated on the pages of Holy Writ. Take the case of Esau and Jacob. When the former lost his birthright and wept, how did he seek to comfort himself? by planning revenge (Gen. 27:41). But when Jacob was "greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen. 32:7) what did he do? Why, he had recourse to God (his "Treasure") and hoped in Him (vv. 9-11). So it was with Saul and David. When the former lost his kingdom (his "treasure") he said to Samuel, "Honour me now, I pray thee before the elders of my people" (1 Sam. 15:30); but

when David lost all at Ziklag he, “encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (1 Sam. 30:6). “Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction” (Psa. 119:92), he exclaimed later. Where do *you* turn in trouble? from where do you seek relief?

“Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matt. 6:20). As in the preceding verse Christ backs up His precept with a weighty consideration, one which is drawn from the unchangeableness and absolute security of heavenly riches. The world may deem His followers crazy and losers because of their separation from its pursuits and pleasures, but the Lord assures them they shall be the everlasting gainers: whatever we do in His name and for His sake shall turn to our account in the Day to come. “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42). God will liberally reward all who deny themselves for Christ’s sake: “Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29). Let us, then, turn our earthly goods into heavenly substance and thus heed our Saviour’s exhortation: “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth neither moth corrupteth” (Luke 12:33).

Who can wish for a better increase than that: the exchange of what is temporal and precarious for that which is eternal and imperishable! What abundant cause have Christians to adore the triune God for having begotten them unto “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for them” (1 Peter 1:4). What reason have they to love, trust, serve and glorify their God. Surely we should rather part with all that we have than with this Treasure—friends, goods, country, liberty, yea life itself; thus it was with the primitive saints, who “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb. 10:34). Those who have Christ for their Treasure find such satisfaction in Him that prosperity will not lift them too high nor adversity cast them down too low.

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). This verse contains a further reason to enforce the commandment in the two preceding: it is common to both, persuading to the obedience of each. The force of this reason may be stated thus: where your treasure is, there will your heart be also: but your heart should not be wedded to earthly objects but to heavenly, therefore, lay not up for yourselves treasures in earth but in Heaven. By “treasure,” as we have stated before, must be understood things which are excellent and precious in our esteem, things laid up for the time to come, wherein we repose our trust and on which we take a special delight. By “heart” we must conceive not only the affections but thoughts, imagination, and will, with the effects of them in action, such as deliberation and endeavour.

Let us try and point out some of the practical uses to which verse 21 may be put. First, how it shows the vast importance of our choosing the right kind of treasure. O how deeply it concerns us for time and eternity that we make a wise selection, for the temper of our minds and the tenor of our lives will be carnal or spiritual according as our treasure is earthly or heavenly. “The heart follows the treasure as the needle follows the loadstone” (Matthew Henry). Whichever way be the direction of our deepest longings, there

will follow our efforts. This from the very constitution of our nature: that which we deem our chief good will employ our principal thoughts, draw forth our fixed longings, stimulate our most earnest endeavours. If we think that happiness is to be found in anything of earth then our whole character will be “of the earth earthy,” for our desires and pursuits will all correspond with the object of our supreme satisfaction. But if we are persuaded that true happiness is only to be found in knowing, loving and serving God, walking and communing with Him, then will our character be spiritual, and our thoughts, desires and pursuits will correspond thereto.

Second, since heart and treasure go together then how important it is that we learn to search out and try the state of our own hearts. It is true that the heart of fallen man is deceitful above all things and that none of us can know it thoroughly, nevertheless if we rightly apply this dictum of Christ unto ourselves we ought to be able to give a true judgment of our spiritual state. Consider: an earthly treasure and an earthly heart: but an heavenly treasure and an heavenly heart—these cannot be severed from each other. Therefore we must diligently enquire: whereon is my love placed, my mind fixed, my care bestowed, my labours directed, my delights found? If honesty requires me to answer, upon an earthly object, then my heart is earthly, and consequently all my church attendance and religious profession is vain (Psa. 10:4, Ezek. 33:31). But if my chief love and delight and my constant concern be a conformity to His image, and my daily endeavour be seeking to please and obey Him, then is my heart heavenly (Psa. 139:17, 18; Isa. 26:9).

Third, this coupling together of the heart and treasure shows us the relative value of the two worlds (this and the one to come) and informs us which of them should be chiefly esteemed and sought after by us. In comparison with Heaven, the earth and mundane life is to be despised. We say the relative value of the two worlds, for we must not be unthankful to God or look with contempt upon the products of His hands. As earthly creatures are the workmanship of God and temporal mercies His blessings, they are not to be hated but received with gratitude and used to His glory; nevertheless, we must not suffer them to obtain in our hearts that place which is due alone the Creator of earth and the Giver of every blessing. As high as Heaven is above the earth and as long as eternity exceeds the duration of time, so far are spiritual things to be esteemed above material; and the more our “treasure” truly is in Heaven, the less disposed shall we be to amass earthly wealth and the more inclined to improve (as means to an end) the things of time and sense.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

13. *Confronting Ahab.*

In previous articles we have seen Elijah called suddenly out of obscurity to appear before the wicked king of Israel and deliver unto him a fearful sentence of judgment, namely, that, "there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Following the pronouncement of this solemn ultimatum the Prophet, in obedience to his Master, retired from the stage of public action and went into seclusion, spending part of the time by the brook Cherith and part in the humble home of the widow at Zarephath, where in each place his needs were miraculously supplied by God, who suffers none to be the loser by complying with His orders. But now the hour had arrived when this intrepid servant of the Lord must issue forth and once more face Israel's idolatrous monarch: "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab" (1 Kings 18:1).

Last Month we contemplated the effect which the protracted drought had upon Ahab and his subjects, an effect which made sadly evident the depravity of the human heart. It is written, "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4)—and again, "when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). How often do we find these sentences cited as though they are absolute and unqualified statements, and how rarely are the words quoted which immediately follow them: in the one case, "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath"; and in the other, "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD." How are we going to understand these passages, for to the natural man they appear to cancel themselves, the second part of the Isaiah one seeming to flatly contradict the former.

If Scripture be compared with Scripture it will be found that each of the above declarations receive clear and definite exemplification. For example, was it not a sense of the Lord's goodness—His "lovingkindness" and "the multitude of His tender mercies"—which led David to repentance and made him to cry, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psa. 51:2)? And again—was it not his realization of the Father's goodness—the fact that there was "bread enough and to spare" in His House which led the prodigal son to repentance and confession of his sins? So also when God's judgments were in the earth, to such an extent that we are told, "In those times there was no peace to him that went out nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity" (2 Chron. 15:5, 6). Did not Asa and his subjects (in response to the preaching of Azariah) "put away the abominable idols out of all the land, and renewed the altar of the Lord"? "And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their hearts" (vv. 8-12). See also Revelation 11:15.

On the other hand, how many instances are recorded in Holy Writ, both of individuals and of peoples, who were the subjects of God's goodness to a marked degree, who enjoyed both His temporal and spiritual blessings in unstinted measure, yet so far were those privileged persons from being suitably affected thereby and led to repentance, their hearts were hardened and God's mercies were abused: "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked" (Deut. 32:15 and cf. Hosea 13:6). So, too, how often we read in Scripture of God's judg-

ments being visited upon both individuals and nations, only for them to illustrate the truth of that word, "Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see" (Isa. 26:11). A conspicuous example is Pharaoh, who after each plague, hardened his heart afresh and continued in his defiance of Jehovah. Perhaps even more notable is the case of the Jews, who century after century have been inflicted with the sorest judgments from the Lord, yet have not learned righteousness thereby.

Ah, have we not witnessed striking demonstrations of these truths in our own life-time, both on the one side and on the other. What "goodness" did God show unto the favoured inhabitants of the British Isles during the lengthy reign of Queen Victoria, yet how few were led to repentance thereby! Divine favours were received as a matter of course, yea, were regarded far more as the fruits of our own industry than of Divine bounty. The more this Nation was prospered the more God faded from its view. A few years later the scene was rudely changed, peace giving way to war and prosperity to suffering. For a period of four years the judgments of God were in the earth to a degree they had not been previously for many centuries, and the flowers of mankind were cut down by the millions: but what percentage of the world's inhabitants learned righteousness? Here and there was one who became serious and perchance made some religious profession, but the masses were as godless and senseless as ever.

And how has it been since 1918? As conditions became more normal, as the wheels of industry turned to the manufacturing of something more lucrative than weapons of destruction, as money flowed more freely and the hours of labour were reduced, how did the people conduct themselves? Great Britain (to name no other countries, though what we write applies with equal force unto many others) was granted a new lease of life. Was she, then, so moved by a sense of God's goodness as to repent of her sins and reform her ways? Far from it: instead, she became more wanton in her mode of life, more godless, more lawless. And now that the judgments of God have again fallen upon her, until her very existence is seriously threatened, death-dealing bombs being rained down upon her inhabitants day and night, yet so far from learning righteousness, the masses are as pleasure-mad as ever, defiance of authority raises its ugly head on every side, while those in high places treat with silent contempt protests against Sabbath desecration.

How, then, are we to understand these Divine declarations: "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" and, "When Thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness"? Obviously they are not to be taken absolutely and without modification. They are to be understood with this proviso: if a sovereign God is pleased to *sanctify them* unto our souls. It is God's ostensible (we say not His secret and invincible) design that displays of His goodness should lead men to repentance and that manifestations of His wrath should bring men into the paths of righteousness: such is their natural tendency, and such ought to be their effect upon us. Yet the fact remains that neither prosperity nor adversity by themselves will produce these beneficent results, for where the Divine dispensations are not expressly sanctified unto us neither His mercies nor His chastisements avail to work any improvement in us.

Hardened sinners "despise the Lord's goodness and longsuffering," prosperity rendering them the less disposed to receive the instructions of righteousness, and where the means of grace (the faithful preaching of God's Word) are freely afforded among them, they continue profane and close their eyes to all the discoveries of Divine grace and holiness. When God's hand is lifted up to administer gentle rebukes, it is despised; and when

more terrible vengeance is inflicted, they steel their hearts against the same. It has always been thus. Only as God is pleased to work in our hearts, as well as before our eyes, only as He deigns to bless unto our souls His providential dealings, is a teachable disposition wrought in us. And only then are we brought to acknowledge His justice in punishing us and to reform our evil ways. Whenever Divine judgments are not definitely sanctified to the soul, sinners continue to stifle conviction and rush forward in defiance until they are finally swallowed up by the wrath of a holy God.

Does someone ask, What has all the above to do with the subject in hand? The answer is, much every way. It goes to show that the terrible perversity of Ahab was no exceptional thing, while it also serves to explain why he was quite unaffected by the sore visitation of God's judgment on his dominion. A total drought which had continued for upwards of three years was upon the land, so that "there was a sore famine in Samaria" (1 Kings 18:2). This was indeed a Divine judgment: did, then, the king and his subjects learn righteousness thereby? Did their ruler set them an example by humbling himself beneath the mighty hand of God, by acknowledging his vile transgressions, by removing the altars of Baal and restoring the worship of Jehovah? No, so far from it, during the interval he suffered his wicked consort to "cut off the Prophets of the LORD" (18:4), thus adding iniquity to iniquity and exhibiting the fearful depths of evil into which the sinner will plunge unless deterred by God's restraining power.

"And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts" (1 Kings 18:5). As a straw in the air reveals the direction of the wind so these words of Ahab indicate the state of his heart. The living God had no place in his thoughts, nor was he exercised over the sins which had called down His displeasure on the land. Nor does he seem to have been the least concerned about his subjects, whose welfare—next to the glory of God—should have been his chief concern. No, his aspirations do not appear to have risen any higher than fountains and brooks, horses and mules, that the beasts which yet remained might be saved. This is not evolution but devolution, for when the heart is estranged from its Maker its direction is ever lower and lower.

In the hour of his deep need Ahab turned not in humility unto God, for he was a stranger to Him. Grass was now his all-absorbing object—providing that could be found, he cared nothing about anything else. If food and drink were obtainable, then he could have enjoyed himself in the palace and been at ease among Jezebel's idolatrous prophets. But the horrors of famine drove him out, yet instead of dwelling upon and rectifying the causes thereof, he seeks only a temporary relief. Alas, he had sold himself to work wickedness and had become the slave of a woman who hated Jehovah. And Ahab, my reader, was not a Gentile, an heathen, but a favoured Israelite; but he had married an heathen and become enamoured with her false gods. He had made shipwreck of the faith and was being driven to destruction. What a terrible thing it is to depart from the living God and forsake the Refuge of our fathers.

"So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself" (v. 6). The reason for this procedure is obvious: by the king going in one direction and the governor of his household in another, twice as much ground would be covered than if they had remained together. But may we not also perceive a mystical meaning of these words: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). And what agreement was there between these two

men? no more than there is between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, for whereas the one was an apostate, the other feared the Lord from his youth (1 Kings 18:12). It was meet, then, that they should separate and take opposite courses, for they were journeying unto entirely different destinies eternally. Let not this be regarded as "far fetched," but rather let us cultivate the habit of looking for the spiritual meaning and application beneath the literal sense of Scripture.

"And as Obadiah was in the way, Behold, Elijah met him" (v. 7). This certainly appears to confirm the mystical application made of the previous verse, for there is surely a spiritual meaning in what we have just quoted. What was "the way" which Obadiah was treading? It was the path of duty, the way of obedience to his master's orders. True it was a very humble task he was performing: that of seeking grass for horses and mules, yet this was the work Ahab had assigned him, and *while complying* with the king's word he was rewarded by meeting Elijah! A parallel case is found in Genesis 24:27, where Eliezer in compliance with Abraham's instructions encountered the damsel whom the Lord had selected as a wife for Isaac: "I being *in the way*, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." So also it was while she was in the path of duty (when gathering of sticks) that the widow of Zarephath met with the Prophet.

We considered last month the conversation which took place between Obadiah and Elijah, but would just mention here that very mixed feelings must have filled the heart of the former as his gaze encountered such an unexpected but welcome sight. Awe and delight would predominate as he beheld the one by whose word the fearful drought and famine had almost completely desolated the land: here was the Prophet of Gilead, alive and well, calmly making his way, alone, back into Samaria. It seemed too good to be true and Obadiah could scarcely believe his eyes: greeting him with becoming deference, he asks, "Art thou that my lord Elijah?" Assuring him of his identity, Elijah bade him go and inform Ahab of his presence. This was a very unwelcome commission, yet it was obediently discharged: "So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him" (1 Kings 18:16).

And what of Elijah while he awaited the approach of the apostate king: was his mind uneasy, picturing the angry monarch gathering around him his officers ere he accepted the Prophet's challenge, and then advancing with bitter hatred and murder in his heart? No, my reader, we cannot suppose so for a moment. The Prophet knew full well that the One who had watched over him so faithfully and supplied his needs so graciously during the long drought, would not fail him now. Had he not good reason to recall how Jehovah had appeared to Laban when he was hotly pursuing Jacob: "And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (Gen. 31:24). It was a simple matter for the Lord to over-awe the heart of Ahab and keep him from murdering Elijah, no matter how much he desired to do so. Let the servants of God fortify themselves with the reflection that He has their enemies completely under His control, He has His bridle in their mouths and turns them about just as He pleases, so that they cannot touch a hair of their heads without either His knowledge or permission.

Elijah, then, waited with dauntless spirit and calmness of heart for the approach of Ahab, as one who was conscious of his own integrity and of his security in the Divine protection. Well might he appropriate to himself those words: "In God have I put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." Different far must have been the state of the king's mind as "Ahab went to meet Elijah" (1 Kings 18:16). Though incensed against

the man whose fearful announcement had been so accurately fulfilled, yet he must have been half afraid to meet him. Ahab had already witnessed his uncompromising firmness and amazing courage, and knowing that Elijah would not now be intimidated by his displeasure, had good reason to fear that this meeting would not be honourable unto himself.

The very fact that the Prophet was seeking him out, yea had sent Obadiah before him to say, "Behold, Elijah is here," must have rendered the king very uneasy. Wicked men are generally great cowards: their own consciences are their accusers, and often cause them many misgivings when in the presence of God's faithful servants, even though they occupy an inferior position in life to themselves. Thus it was with king Herod in connection with Christ's forerunner, for we are told, "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and holy" (Mark 6:20). In like manner, Felix, the Roman governor, trembled before Paul (though Paul was his prisoner) when the Apostle "reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Let not the ministers of Christ hesitate to boldly deliver their message, nor be afraid of the displeasure of the most influential in their congregations.

"And Ahab went to meet Elijah." We might have hoped that after proving from painful experience the Tishbite was no deceiver, but a true servant of Jehovah whose word had accurately come to pass, that he had now relented, been convinced of his sin and folly, and ready to turn to the Lord in humble repentance. But not so: instead of advancing toward the Prophet with a desire to receive spiritual instruction from him or to request his prayers for him, he fondly hoped that he might now avenge himself for all that he and his subjects had suffered. His opening salutation at once revealed the state of his heart: "Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17). What a contrast from the greeting given Elijah by the pious Obadiah! No word of contrition fell from Ahab's lips. Hardened by sin, his conscience "seared as with a hot iron," he gave vent to his obduracy and fury.

"Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" This is not to be regarded as an unmeasured outburst, the petulant expression of a sudden surprisal, but rather as indicating the wretched state of his soul, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It was the avowed antagonism between evil and good: it was the hissing of the Serpent's seed against one of the members of Christ: it was the vented spite of one who felt condemned by the very presence of the righteous. Years later, speaking of another devoted servant of God, whose counsel was demanded by Jehoshaphat, this same Ahab said, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (22:8). So far, then, from this charge of Ahab's making against the character and mission of Elijah it was a tribute to his integrity, for there is no higher testimony to the fidelity of God's servants than their evoking of the hearty hatred of the Ahabs around them.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

6. *Its Problem.*

To human reason there appears to be a definite conflict between two distinct lines of Divine Truth. On the one hand Scripture plainly affirms that fallen man is totally depraved, enslaved by sin, entirely destitute of spiritual strength, so that he is unable of himself to either truly repent or savingly believe in Christ. On the other hand Scripture uniformly addresses fallen man as a being who is accountable to God, responsible to forsake his wickedness and serve and glorify his Maker. He is called upon to lay down the weapons of his warfare and be reconciled to God. The Ruler of Heaven and earth has not lowered the standard of holiness which He has placed man under, and declares that notwithstanding his ruined condition, he is "without excuse" for all his iniquities. The Gospel finds its subjects in a lost state, yea, "dead in trespasses and sins," nevertheless it exhorts all who come under its sound to accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

Such in brief is the problem presented by the doctrine we are here considering. The unregenerate are morally impotent, yet they are fully accountable beings; they are sold under sin, yet are they justly required to be holy as God is holy; they are unable to comply with the righteous requirements of their Sovereign, yet they are exhorted to do so under pain of eternal death. What, then, should be our attitude unto this problem? First, we should carefully *test* it and thoroughly satisfy ourselves that both of these facts are plainly set forth in Holy Writ. Second, having done so, we must *accept* them both at their face value, assured that however contrary they may seem to us, yet there is perfect harmony between all parts of God's Word. Third, we must *hold* firmly to *both* these lines of Truth, steadfastly refusing to relinquish either of them at the dictates of any theological party or denominational leaders. Fourth, we should humbly *wait* upon God, so that if it pleases Him He will grant us fuller light thereon.

But such a course is just what the proud heart of man is disinclined to follow. Instead, he desires to reduce everything to a simple, consistent, and coherent system, which falls within the compass of his finite understanding. Notwithstanding the fact that he is surrounded by mystery on every side in the natural realm, notwithstanding the fact that so very much of God's providential dealings both with the world in general and with himself in particular are "past finding out," yet he is determined to philosophize and manipulate God's Truth until it is compressed into a series of logical propositions which appear reasonable unto him. He is like the disciples whom our Lord called "fools" because they were "slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets had spoken" (Luke 24:25). Those disciples were guilty of picking and choosing, believing what appealed to their inclinations and rejecting that which was distasteful and which appeared unto them to clash with what they had been taught.

The testimony of the Prophets did not seem to the disciples to be harmonious: one part appeared to conflict with another. As a fact there were two distinct lines of Messianic prediction which looked as though they flatly contradicted each other. The one spoke of a suffering, humiliated and crucified Messiah; the other of an all-powerful, glorious and triumphant Messiah. And because the disciples could not see how *both* could be true, they held to the one and rejected the other. Precisely the same evil course has been followed by theologians in Christendom. Conflicting schools or parties among them have, as it were, divided the Truth among themselves, one party retaining this portion, and jettisoning that, and another party rejecting this and maintaining that. Speaking broadly they

have ranged themselves into two main opposing groups, each holding one side of the Truth only, the other rejecting what their opponents contended for. Party spirit has been as rife and has had the same ruinous effect upon the religious world as it has in the political.

On the one side Arminians have maintained that men are responsible creatures, that the claims of God are to be pressed upon them, that they must be called upon to discharge their duty, that they are the fit subjects of exhortation. Yet while steadfastly adhering to this side of the Truth, they have been guilty of repudiating other parts thereof which are equally necessary and important. They have denied—in effect if not in words—the total depravity of man, his complete spiritual helplessness, the bondage of his will under sin, and his utter inability to so much as co-operate with the Holy Spirit in the work of his salvation. On the other side Antinomians, while affirming all that the Arminians deny, are themselves guilty of repudiating what their opponents contend for, insisting that since the unregenerate have no power to perform spiritual acts it is useless and absurd to call upon them to do so, and that Gospel offers should not be made unto them.

These Antinomians consider themselves to be towers of orthodoxy, valiant defenders of the Truth, more sound in the Faith than any other section of Christendom. Many of them at least wish to be regarded as “strict Calvinists,” but whatever else they may be, that they certainly are not, for Calvin himself taught and practiced directly the contrary. In his work on “The Eternal Predestination of God” the great Reformer wrote: “It is quite manifest that all men, without difference or distinction, are outwardly called or invited to repentance and faith . . . the mercy of God is offered to those who believe and to those who believe not, so that those who are not Divinely taught within are only rendered inexcusable, not saved” (p. 95).

In his “The Secret Providence of God” he asks, “And what if God invites the whole mass of mankind to come unto Him, and yet knowingly and of His own will denies His Spirit to the greater part, ‘drawing’ a few only unto obedience unto Himself by His Spirit’s secret inspiration and operation—is the adorable God to be charged, on that account, with inconsistency?” (p. 316). “Nor is there any want of harmony or oneness of truth when the same Saviour, who invites all men unto Him without exception by His external voice, yet declares that ‘A man can receive nothing except it be given him from above’ (John 19:11)” (p. 344, Sovereign Grace Union edition, 1927). Alas that so many regarding themselves as Calvinists have departed so far from the teaching and practice of that eminent servant of God.

We may point out at this stage that there is no difference in principle between the unregenerate now being called upon to obey the Gospel and to accept its gracious overtures, than there was in the whole heathen world being required to respond unto the calls of God *through nature*, before His Son became incarnate. In his address to the Athenians the Apostle declared on Mars Hill, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of Heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him” (Acts 17:24-27). The force of which is this: Seeing God is the Creator, the Governor of all, He cannot be supposed to inhabit temples made by men nor wor-

shipped with the products of their hands; and seeing that He is the universal Benefactor and Source of life and all things to His creatures, He is on that account required to be adored and obeyed; and since He is sovereign Lord appointing the different ages of the world and allotting to the nations their territories, His favour is to be *sought after* and His will submitted unto.

The voice of Nature is clear and loud. It testifies to the being of God, and tells of His wisdom, goodness and power. It addresses itself unto all alike, bidding men to believe in God, turn unto and serve Him. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). These are the preachers of Nature and to all nations alike. They are not silent, but vocal, speaking to those in every land: "Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge: there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard, their line is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world" (vv. 2-4). It is in view of these and similar phenomena that the Apostle declares, "that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19, 20).

Now why do not Antinomians object to this voice of Nature addressing itself to men indiscriminately? Why do not these hyper-Calvinists protest against what we may designate the theology of the sun and the moon? Why do they not exclaim, There is no proper basis for such a call as Nature makes. It is not only a mocking of the unregenerate, but it is unworthy of God, seeing that it is certain to prove fruitless, for He has not purposed that either savage or sage should respond to Nature's call. But with the sober and the spiritual this branch of the Divine government needs no apology. It is in all respects worthy of Him who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working. Those parts of mankind who have not the sacred Scriptures are as truly rational and accountable beings as those who are born with God's written Word. Their having lost the power to read God's character in His works and the inclination to seek after and find Him, does not in the least divest the Lord of His right to require of them both that inclination and power, and to deal with them by various methods of Providence according to their several advantages.

Intelligent creatures who, by failing into apostasy, have become blind to God's excellencies and enemies to Him in their minds, are yet to be commanded to yield Him the homage which is His due and should be urged and exhorted by a thousand tongues, speaking from every quarter of the Heaven and the earth. They are to be instructed to turn unto Him as their supreme good, although it is absolutely certain that without gifts they possess not, and without a supernatural work of grace being wrought in their hearts, not one of them will ever incline his ear who does not perceive that this is a constitution of things most unimpeachable, and in every respect worthy of the character of Him who is "righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." The light of Nature renders all men "without excuse," and God has a perfect right to require them to seek after Him without vouchsafing the power of doing so, which power He is under no obligation to bestow.

Exactly analogous to this is the case of those who come under the sound of the Gospel, yet without being chosen to salvation or redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. The love of God in Christ to sinners is proclaimed unto them, and they are exhorted and entreated by all sorts of arguments to believe in Christ and be saved. Let it be

clearly pointed out that no obstacle lies in the way of the reprobates' believing but what exists in their own evil hearts. Their minds are free to think and their wills to act. They do just as they please, unforced by anyone. They choose and refuse as seems good unto themselves. The secret purpose of God in not appointing them unto everlasting life, or in withholding from them the renewing operations of His Spirit, has no causal influence on the decision to which they come. Their advantages are vastly superior to the opportunities of those who enjoy only the light of nature.

The manifestation of the Divine character granted unto those living in Christendom is incomparably brighter and more impressive than that vouchsafed unto those born in heathendom, and consequently their responsibility is proportionately the greater. Much more is given unto the former, and on the ground of equity, much more shall certainly be required of them (Luke 12:48). What, then, shall we say of the conduct of the Most High in His dealings with such persons? Shall we presumptuously question His sincerity in exhorting them by His Word or His sincerity in striving with them by the general operations of His Spirit (Gen. 6:3; Acts 7:51)? With equal propriety might we question the sincerity of Nature, when she bears witness to God's power in the shaking of the earth and the kindling of the volcano, or of His goodness in clothing the valleys with corn and filling the pastures with flocks, leaving Himself "not without witness" (Acts 14:17), and this in order that men "should seek after the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him" (Acts 17:27).

That what has been pointed out in the last six paragraphs entirely removes the difficulty felt by those who do not perceive the propriety in exhorting sinners to perform acts altogether beyond their power we by no means affirm, but we do insist that in the light of God's method in dealing with the vast majority of our fellows in the past it effectually blunts its point and shows that ministers err grievously if they allow their hands to be tied or their mouths muzzled thereby, and thus disobey Christ. The only difference between those living under the Gospel and those who had only the light of Nature seems to be that the grace of the one dispensation is far greater than that of the other, that the responsibility is higher in proportion, and that the condemnation which results from disobedience must therefore be much less tolerable in the one case than in the other in the great Day of Accounts. To those Divinely called to preach the Gospel their course is clear: they are to go forth in obedience to their commission, addressing themselves unto "every creature," beseeching their hearers to be reconciled to God.

Speaking for himself, this writer (who for upwards of twenty years was active in oral ministry) never found any other consideration to deter him from sounding forth the universal call of the Gospel. He knew there might well be some in his congregation who had sinned that sin for which there is no forgiveness (Matt. 12:31, 32), others who had probably sinned away their day of grace, having quenched the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) till it was no longer possible to renew them again unto repentance (Luke 13:24, 25; 19:48); yet since this was mercifully concealed from us, we sought to cry aloud and spare not. We knew that the Gospel was to prove the savour of death unto death unto some, and that God sometimes sends His servant forth with a commission similar to that of Isaiah's (6:9, 10), yet that furnished no more reason why we should be silent than that the sun and moon should cease proclaiming their Creator's glory merely because the world is blind and deaf.

In this same connection it is pertinent to consider the striking and solemn case of Pharaoh. It presents indeed an awe-inspiring spectacle, yet that must not hinder us from looking at it and ascertaining what light it throws on the character and ways of the Most High. It is the case not merely of an isolated individual, but of a fearfully numerous class—the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. It is true that Pharaoh was not called upon to believe and be saved, he was not exhorted to yield himself to the constraining love of God as manifested in the gift of His Son, but he was required to submit himself unto the authority of God and bidden to render obedience unto His revealed will. He was ordered to let Jehovah's people go that they might serve Him in the wilderness, and he was required to comply with the Divine command not sullenly or reluctantly, not as a matter of necessity, but with his whole heart.

Let it not be overlooked that every Divine command virtually implies a promise, for our duty and our interest are in every instance inseparably conjoined (Deut. 10:12, 13). If God is truly obeyed He will be truly glorified, and if He be truly glorified He will be truly enjoyed. Had the king of Egypt obeyed, we are warranted to say that his fate would have been different: he would have been regarded not with disapprobation but with favour, would have been the object not of punishment but rather of reward. Nevertheless, it was not intended that he should obey. The Most High had decreed otherwise. Before ever Moses entered the presence of Pharaoh and made known Jehovah's command, He informed His servant, "I will harden his heart that he shall not let the people go" (Exo. 4:21). Unspeakably awful is this, yet it need not surprise us: the same sun whose rays melt the wax hardens the clay—an adumbration in the visible realm of what takes place in the hearts of the renewed and of the unregenerate.

Not only was it God's intention to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he should not obey His command, but He plainly declared, "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up: for to show in thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth" (Exo. 9:16). The connection in which that solemn verse is quoted in Romans 9:17 makes it unmistakably plain that God ordained this haughty monarch should be an everlasting monument of His severity. Here then we behold the Ruler of this world dealing with men—for as previously pointed out Pharaoh was representative of a large class—dealing with them about what concerns their highest interests, their weal or their woe throughout eternity and all the while—not intending their happiness, not determining to confer the grace which would enable them to comply with His will—yet issuing *commands* to them, denouncing threatenings, working signs and wonders before them, enduring them with much longsuffering while they added sin to sin and ripened for destruction. Yet let it be remembered that there was nothing which hindered Pharaoh from obeying save his own depravity. Whatever objection may be brought against the Gospel calling upon the non-elect to repent and believe may with equal propriety be brought against the whole procedure of God with Pharaoh.—A.W.P.

THE CALL OF CHRIST.

“Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Familiar as is the sound of those words unto professing Christians, yet there is a pressing need for their careful examination, for there are few portions of God’s Word which have received such superficial treatment at the hands of preachers generally as has the above. That these verses, like all others in the Sacred Volume, call for prayerful meditation some will formally allow, but that such a “simple passage” demands protracted *study* few seem to realize. It is at this very point so much damage has been wrought: many took it for granted they already understood the meaning of such a passage, and hence no diligent inquiry into the significance of its terms was undertaken. The mere fact that a verse is so frequently quoted that we are thoroughly familiar with its language, is no proof that we really perceive its purport: yea, the fact that such familiarity has precluded careful examination renders it far more likely that we do *not* rightly apprehend it.

There is a vast difference between being acquainted with the *sound* of a verse of Holy Writ and entering into the *sense* of it. The sad fact is that today there are thousands of unqualified “evangelists” and self-appointed open-air “speakers” who glibly quote snippets from the Word of God, yet no more understand the spiritual significance of the words uttered by their lips than the telegraph wires cognize the messages which pass over them. Nor is this to be wondered at. Ours is an age which is more and more marked by industrial loafing and mental slackness, when work is detested, when how quickly a task may be disposed of rather than how well it may be done is the order of the day. And the same dilatory spirit and slipshod methods mark the products both of the pulpit and the printed page. Hence the superficial treatment which the above passage commonly receives: no regard is paid to its context, no laborious attempt assayed to ascertain its coherence (the relation of one clause to another), no pains-taking examination and exposition of its terms.

If ever a passage of Scripture was mutilated and mangled by preachers, its meaning perverted and wrested, it is the one quoted above. Nineteen times out of twenty only a mere fragment of it is quoted: that part which is most unpalatable to the flesh being omitted. A particular call is twisted into a promiscuous invitation by deliberately ignoring the qualifying terms there used by the Saviour. Even where the opening clause is quoted, no attempt is made to show what is signified by and involved in “come to Christ,” so that the hearer is left to assume that he already understands the meaning of that expression. The special offices in which the Son of God is there portrayed, namely, as Lord and Master, as Prince and Prophet, are ignored, and another is substituted in their place. The conditional promise here made by Christ is falsified by making it an unconditional one, as though His “rest” could be obtained without our taking His “yoke” upon us and without our “learning” of Him who is meek and lowly in heart.

We are well aware that such charges and strictures as we have just made would be bitterly resented by a large class of church-goers, who do not wish to hear anyone or anything criticized. But it is not for them we write: if they are prepared to remain “at ease in Zion,” if they are content whether they be deceived or not, if they have such confidence in men that they are willing to receive the most valuable and vital things of all second hand, if they refuse to examine their foundations and search their hearts, then we must

“let them alone” (Matt. 15:14). But there are still a few left on earth who prize their souls so highly that they consider no effort too great in order to ascertain whether or not they possess a saving knowledge of God’s truth, whether or not they truly understand the terms of God’s salvation, whether or not they are building on an unshakable foundation: and it is in the hope that the Lord may deign to bless these articles unto them that we are penning the same.

But let us now take a closer look at our passage. It opens with “Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest,” and virtually closes with, “and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Now it is not (as some have strangely supposed) two different rests which are here spoken of, but the same in both cases, namely, spiritual rest, saving rest. Nor is it two different aspects of this rest which are here portrayed, but rather the one rest is viewed from two distinct viewpoints. In the former, Divine sovereignty is in view: “I will give”; in the latter, human responsibility is being enforced: “ye shall find.” In the opening clause Christ makes the bare affirmation that He is the Giver of rest: in what follows He specifies the terms upon which He dispenses rest; or to express it in another way, the conditions which must be met by us if we are to obtain the same. The rest is freely given, yet only to those who comply with the revealed requirements of its Bestower.

“Come unto Me.” Who is it that issues this call? Christ, you reply. True, but Christ in what *particular character*? Some may ask, Exactly what do you mean by that? This: was Christ here speaking as King, commanding His subjects; as Creator, addressing His creatures; as the Physician, inviting the sick; or as Lord, instructing His servants? Does someone reply, Such distinctions confuse, are beyond me: sufficient for me to regard this as the Saviour offering rest unto poor sinners. But do you not yourself draw a distinction in your mind between the Person of Christ and the office of Christ? and do you not distinguish sharply between His office as Prophet, as Priest, and as King? And have you not found such distinctions both necessary and helpful? Then why complain if we are seeking to call attention to the varied relations which our Lord sustains and the importance of noting *which* of these relations He is acting in at any given time. It is attention to such details as this which often makes all the difference between a right and wrong understanding of a passage.

In order to answer our query, In what particular character did Christ here issue this call “Come unto Me,” it is necessary for us to look at the verses preceding: attention to the context is one of the very first concerns for those who would carefully ponder any particular passage. Matthew 11 opens with mention of John the Baptist having been cast into prison, from which he sent messengers unto Christ acquainting Him with his perplexity (vv. 2, 3). Thereupon our Lord publicly vindicated His forerunner and magnified his unique office (vv. 4-15). Having praised the Baptist and his ministry, Christ went on to reprove those who had been privileged to enjoy both it and that of His own, because they profited not from the same, yea, had despised and rejected both the one and the other. So depraved were the people of that day, they accused John of being demon possessed and charged Christ with being a glutton and a winebibber (vv. 16-19).

In verses 20-24 we have one of the most solemn passages to be found in Holy Writ, recording as it does some of the most fearful words which ever fell from the lips of the incarnate Son of God. He unbraided the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, and that, because “they repented not” (v. 20). Let it be duly noted by those who seem to delight in picturing our Lord as a spineless and effeminate person, who was in-

capable of uttering a syllable that would hurt the feelings of anyone—a caricature of maudlin sentimentality manufactured by Romanists, but since fostered increasingly by many in the ranks of Protestantism—that the Christ of Scripture refused to gloss over the perversity of the people, instead, charging them with their sins. And let Antinomians also observe that, so far from the Christ of God ignoring human responsibility or excusing men's spiritual impotency, He held them strictly accountable and blamed them for their impenitency.

“Willful impenitency is the great damning sin of multitudes that enjoy the Gospel, and which (more than any other) sinners will be upbraided with to eternity. The great doctrine that both John the Baptist, Christ Himself, and the Apostles preached, was *repentance*; the great thing designed both in the ‘piping’ and in the ‘mourning’ was to prevail with people to change their minds and ways, to leave their sins and turn to God; but this they would not be brought to. He does not say, because they *believed* not, for some kind of faith many of them had, that Christ was a ‘Teacher come from God’ but because they ‘*repented not*’—their faith did not prevail to the transforming of their hearts and the reforming of their lives. Christ reproveth them for their other sins that He might lead them to repentance, but when they repented not, He upbraided them with that as their refusal to be healed. He upbraided them with it, that they might upbraid themselves, and might at length see the folly of it, as that which alone makes the sad case a desperate one and the wound incurable” (Matthew Henry).

The particular sin for which Christ upbraided them was that of impenitency, the special aggravation of their sin was that they had witnessed most of Christ's miraculous works, for it was in those cities the Lord had for some time been residing and where many of His miracles of healing had been performed. Now there are some places which enjoy the means of grace more plentifully and powerfully than others. As certain parts of the earth receive a much heavier rainfall than others, certain countries and particular towns in them have been favoured with purer Gospel preaching and more outpourings of the Spirit than others, for God is sovereign in the distribution of His gifts both natural and spiritual. And “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Luke 12:48). The greater our privileges and opportunities the greater our obligations, and the stronger the inducements we have to repent the more heinous is impenitency, and the heavier will the reckoning be. Christ keeps note of His “mighty works” done among us, and will yet hold us to an account of them.

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!” (Matt. 11:21). Christ came into the world in order to dispense blessing, but if His person be despised, His authority rejected, and His mercies slighted, then He has woes in reserve, and His woes are of all the most terrible. But how many who attend church now hear anything at all about this? O the treachery of the modern pulpit, its abounding unfaithfulness! It has deliberately taken the line of least resistance and sought only to please the pew, guiltily withholding what is unpalatable and unpopular. How often was this writer told, even twenty years ago, “our people would not tolerate such plain speaking” and, “preaching of that kind would empty our church,” to which we replied, “far better close your church altogether than keep it open for the purpose of deceiving souls.” And souls are deceived if a sentimental Christ is substituted for the Scriptural Christ, if His “Beatitudes” of Matthew 5 are emphasized and His “Woes” of Matthew 23 be ignored.

In still further aggravation of their sin of impenitency, our Lord affirmed that the citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida were worse at heart than the Gentiles they despised, asserting that had Tyre and Sidon enjoyed such privileges as had been theirs, they had “repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” Some of the blessings which Christendom despises would be welcomed in many parts of heathendom. “We are not competent to solve every difficulty, or fully to understand the whole of this subject; it suffices that Christ knew the hearts of the impenitent Jews to be more hardened in rebellion and enmity, and less susceptible of suitable impressions from His doctrine and miracles, than those of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon would have been; and therefore their final condemnation would be proportionally more intolerable” (Thomas Scott). It is to be noted on the one hand that this passage does not stand alone—see Ezekiel 3:6, 7; and on the other that the repentance here spoken of by Christ is not necessarily one which leads to eternal salvation.

Still more solemn are the awful words of Christ recorded in Matthew 11:23, 24. There He announces the doom of highly-favoured Capernaum. Because of the unspeakable privileges vouchsafed its inhabitants, they had been lifted Heavenwards, but because their hearts were so earth-bound they scorned such blessings, and therefore they would be “brought down to Hell.” The greater the advantages enjoyed, the more fearful the doom of those who abuse them; the higher the elevation, the more fatal the fall from it. The honourable Capernaum is then compared with the dishonourable Sodom, which, because of its enormities, God had destroyed with fire and brimstone. It was in Capernaum that the Lord Jesus had chiefly resided upon entry into His public ministry, and where so many of His miracles of healing had been wrought. Yet so obdurate were its inhabitants, so wedded to their sins, they refused to apply unto Him for the healing of their souls. Had such mighty works been done by Him in Sodom its people would have been duly affected thereby and their city had remained as a lasting monument of Divine mercy.

“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (v. 24). Yes, my reader, though you may hear nothing about it from the flesh-pleasing pulpit of this degenerate age, nevertheless *there is* a “Day of judgment” awaiting the whole world. It is “the Day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; it is the Day “when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel” (Rom. 2:6, 7, 16). “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14). “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:9). The punishment which shall then be meted out will be proportioned to the opportunities given and despised, the privileges vouchsafed and scorned, the light granted and quenched. Most intolerable of all will be the doom of those who have abused the greatest advancements Heavenwards.

“At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25). The connection between this and the preceding verses is most blessed and instructive. There the Lord Jesus intimates that the majority of His mighty works had produced no good effect upon those who saw them, that their beholders remained impenitent—so little influence had His holy and gracious presence exerted upon Capernaum, wherein He spent much of His time, that its fate would be worse than

that of Sodom. But here Christ looks away from earth to Heaven, and finds consolation in the high sovereignty of God and the absolute security of His covenant. From upbraiding the impenitence of men Christ turned to the rendering of thanks unto the Father. On the word “answered” Matthew Henry said, “It is called an answer though no other words are found recorded but His own, because it is so comfortable a reply to the melancholy considerations preceding it, and is aptly set in the balance against them.”

A word of warning is needed, perhaps, at this point, for we are such creatures of extremes. In earlier paragraphs we referred to those who have substituted a sentimental Christ for the true Christ, yet the reader must not infer from this that the writer believes in a stoical Christ—hard, cold, devoid of feeling. Not so, the Christ of Scripture is perfect Man as well as God the Son, possessed therefore of human sensibilities, yea, capable of much deeper feeling than any of us, whose faculties are corrupted and blunted by sin. It must not be thought, then, that the Lord Jesus was unaffected by grief, when He pronounced the doom of those cities, or that He viewed them with fatalistic indifference as He found comfort in the sovereignty of God. Scripture must be compared with Scripture: He who wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) would not be unmoved as He foresaw the intolerable portion awaiting Capernaum—the very fact that He was “the Man of sorrows” utterly precludes any such concept.

A similar warning is needed by hyper-Calvinists with fatalistic stoicism. “It seems plain then, that those who are indifferent about the event of the Gospel, who satisfy themselves with this thought, that the elect shall be saved, and feel no concern for unawakened sinners, make a wrong inference from a true doctrine, and know not what spirit they are of. Jesus wept for those who perished in their sins. Paul had great grief and sorrow of heart for the Jews, though he gave them this character, ‘that they pleased not God, and were contrary to all men.’ It well becomes us, while we admire distinguishing grace to ourselves, to mourn over others: and inasmuch as secret things belong to the Lord, and we know not but some of whom we have at present but little hopes, may at last be brought to the knowledge of the Truth, we should be patient and forbearing after the pattern of our heavenly Father, and endeavour by every proper and prudent means to stir them up to repentance, remembering that they cannot be more distant from God than by nature we were once ourselves” (John Newton.)

As perfect Man and as “Minister of the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8) the Lord Jesus felt acutely any lack of response to and the little measure of success which attended His gracious and arduous efforts: this is clear from His lament: “I have laboured in vain, I have spent My strength for naught” (Isa. 49:4). Striking it is to observe how Christ comforted Himself: “yet surely My judgment is with the Lord, and My work (or “reward”) with My God” (Isa. 49:4). Thus, both in the language of prophecy and here in Matthew 11:25, 26, we find the Lord Jesus seeking relief from the discouragements and disappointments of the Gospel by retreating into the Divine sovereignty. “We may take great encouragement in looking upward to God, when round about us we see nothing but what is discouraging. It is sad to see how regardless most men are of their own happiness, it is comfortable to think that the wise and faithful God will, however, effectually secure the interests of His own glory” (Matthew Henry).

Christ alluded here to the sovereignty of God under three details. First, by owning His Father as “Lord of Heaven and earth,” that is, as sole Proprietor and Disposer thereof. It is well for us to remember, especially in seasons when it appears as though Satan is com-

plete master of this lower sphere, that God not only “doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven,” but also “among the inhabitants of the earth,” so that “none can stay His hand” (Dan. 4:35). Second, by affirming, “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent”: that is, the things pertaining to salvation are concealed from the apprehension of the self-sufficient and self-complacent, God leaving them in nature’s darkness. Third, by declaring, “and hast revealed them unto babes”: by the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit a Divine discovery is made to the hearts of those who are made little and helpless in their own esteem. “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” expressed the Saviour’s perfect acquiescence in the whole.

“All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). This verse supplies the immediate connecting link between the sovereignty of Divine grace mentioned in verses 25 and 26, and the offer and communication of that grace through Christ in verses 28-30. The settlements of Divine grace were made and secured in the Everlasting Covenant: the communication of the same is by and through Christ as the Mediator of that covenant. First, we have here the grand commission which the Mediator received from the Father: all things necessary to the administration of the covenant were delivered unto Christ (compare Matt. 28:18, John 5:22, 17:2). Second, we have here the inconceivable dignity of the Son: lest a false inference be drawn from the preceding clause, the essential and absolute Deity of Christ is affirmed. Inferior in *office*, Christ’s *nature* and *dignity* is the same as the Father’s. As Mediator Christ receives all from the Father, but as God the Son He is, in every way, equal to the Father in His incomprehensible and glorious Person. Third, the work of the Mediator is here summed up in one grand item: that of revealing the Father unto those given to Him.

Thus the context of Matthew 11:28 reveals Christ in the following characters As the Upbraider of the impenitent; as the Pronouncer of solemn “woe” upon those who were unaffected by His mighty works; as the Announcer of the Day of judgment, declaring that the punishment awaiting those who scorned Gospel mercies should be more intolerable than that meted out to Sodom: as the Affirmer of the high sovereignty of God who conceals and reveals the things pertaining to salvation as seemeth good in His sight; as the Mediator of the covenant; as the Son co-equal with the Father, and as the One by whom the Father is revealed.—A.W.P.

