

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—November, 1941**THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.**

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exo. 20:16). Take these words simply at their face value and they prohibit only the horrible crime of perjury or the giving of false testimony in a court of law, but as with the previous Commandments, so here: much more is implied and inculcated than is specifically stated. As we have so often pointed out, each of the Ten Commandments enunciates a general principle, and not only are all other sins forbidden which are allied to the one named and prohibited, together with all causes and tendencies thereto, but the opposite virtue is definitely required, with all that fosters and promotes it. Thus in its wider meaning this Ninth Commandment reprehends any word of ours which would injure the reputation of our neighbour, be it uttered in public or in private. This should scarcely need any arguing, for if we restrict this Commandment to its literal terms it would have no bearing on any save that small minority who are called upon to bear witness in a court of justice.

In its widest application this Commandment has to do with the regulation of our *speech*, which is one of the distinguishing and ennobling faculties that God has bestowed upon man. Scripture tells us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21), that “a wholesome tongue is a tree of life” (Prov. 15:4), and that an unbridled one is “an unruly evil and full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). That our words are not to be uttered lightly or thoughtlessly is made clear by that unspeakably solemn utterance of our Lord’s, “But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36, 37). O how we need to pray, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psa. 141:3). The duties concerning our tongues may be summed up in two words: our speech must always be true and spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). Thus, as the Eighth Commandment provides for the security of our neighbour’s property, so this one is designed to preserve his good name by our speaking the truth about him in love.

Negatively this Ninth Commandment forbids all false and injurious speeches respecting our neighbour: positively it inculcates the conservation of *truth*. “The end of this Precept is that because God, who is Truth itself, execrates a lie, we ought to preserve the truth without the least disguise” (Calvin). Veracity is the strict observance of truth in all our communications. The importance and necessity of this appears from the fact that almost all that mankind knows is derived from communications. The value of those statements which we accept from others depends entirely on their verity and accuracy: if they are false, they are worthless, misleading, evil. Veracity is not only a virtue, but it is the root of all other virtues and the foundation of all right character; and therefore in Scripture, “truth,” is often synonymous with “righteousness.” The godly man is “he that speaketh truth in his heart” (Psa. 15:2). The man that “doeth truth” (John 3:21) has discharged his duty. It is by the Truth the Holy Spirit sanctifies the soul (John 17:17).

The positive form of this Ninth Commandment is found in “speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour” (Zech. 8:16): thus the first sin prohibited therein is that of *lying*. Now a lie, properly speaking, consists of three elements or ingredients: speaking what is not true, deliberately doing so, and doing so with an intent to deceive. Every falsehood is not a lie: we may be misinformed or deceived and sincerely think we are stating facts, and consequently have no design of imposing on others. On the other hand, we may speak that which is true and yet lie in so doing:

as when we report what is true yet believe it to be false and utter it with an intention to deceive; or when we report the figurative words of another and pretend he meant them literally, as was the case with those who bore false witness against Christ (Matt. 26:60). The worst form of lying (between men) is when we maliciously invent a falsehood for the purpose of damaging the reputation of our neighbour, which is what is more especially in view in the terms of the Ninth Commandment.

How vile and abominable this sin is appears from the following considerations. It is a sin which makes a person most like the Devil. The Devil is a spirit, and therefore gross carnal sins correspond not unto his nature. His sins are more refined and intellectual, such as pride and malice, deception and falsehood. "He is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44), and the more malice enters into the composition of any lie, the more nearly it resembles him. It is therefore a sin most contrary to the nature and character of God, for He is "the LORD God of truth" (Psa. 31:5), and therefore we are told, "lying lips are an abomination unto the LORD" (Prov. 12:22). As Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and as God is the Lord God of Truth, so His children resemble Him therein: "seeing they are My people, children that will not lie" (Isa. 63:8). God has threatened a most fearful punishment upon them: "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8).

Alas, to what fearful heights has this sin risen. It has become so common that few indeed have any conscience thereon, until we have to lament, "truth is fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14). First, truth departed from the pulpits. A whole century has passed since the lie of evolution captivated the scientific world and then was taken up by thousands of unregenerate preachers—a lie which strikes at the very foundations of Truth, for it repudiates man's Fall, and sets aside his need both of redemption and regeneration. For the same length of time the so-called "higher criticism" of German neologians has been peddled throughout the English-speaking world by thousands of godless ministers who wished to be looked up to as men of superior intellectuality. Once Truth departed from the pulpits it was not long before it departed from the halls of legislation and the marts of commerce, until we now live in a world where confidence between nations is nonexistent and where the word of our fellows is no longer to be relied upon.

How deeply important it is, then, that a sacred regard for the truth should be constantly pressed upon the young and that they should be taught that lying is the inlet of all vice and corruption. Equally important is it that those who have charge of the young, particularly their parents, should set before the little ones a personal example of what they teach, and not neutralize the same by making promises to them which they fail to fulfill or utter threats which they never carry out. It is the part of wisdom and prudence that each of us should be very slow in making an unconditional promise, but once it is made it must be kept at all costs, unless the keeping of it compels us to sin against God. The prohibition of bearing false witness against my neighbour equally forbids me to bear false witness about myself, which is done when I pose as being holier than I am or when I pretend to be more humble or more anything else than is actually the case.

It remains for us to point out that we may violate this Ninth Commandment even when we speak the truth, if we speak it unnecessarily and from improper motives. "We injure the character of our neighbour when we retail his real faults without any call to divulge them, when we relate them to those who have no right to know them, and when we tell them not to promote any good end but to make him lose his estimation in society . . . Nay, we transgress this precept when we

do not speak at all, for by holding our peace when something injurious is said of another we tacitly give our assent by concealing what we know to the contrary" (John Dick). Flattering a person is another form of violating this precept: to compliment another merely for the sake of pleasing him or gratifying his vanity is to perjure your soul and imperil his safety. So also to give a false testimony of character or to recommend a friend to another when we know him to be unworthy of the testimonial is to bear "false witness."

The following directions, through the grace of God, may be helpful in preserving from these common sins. 1. Be not swayed by party spirit if you would be kept from slandering others. The spirit of sectarianism begets prejudice and prejudice makes us unwilling to receive and acknowledge good in those who walk not with us and ready to believe the worst of them. How often writers are guilty here: denominational bigotry has caused many a man to misinterpret those who differ from him and to impute to him errors which he does not hold. 2. Be not busy in other men's affairs: attend to your own business and leave others for God to attend to. 3. Reflect much upon your own sinfulness and weakness: instead of being so ready to behold the mote in your brother's eye, consider the beam in your own. 4. Shun the company of talebearers and tattlers: idle gossip is injurious to the soul. 5. If others slander you, see to it that you have a conscience void of offense toward God and man, and then it matters not what others think or say about you.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

20. *Unlawful Judgment*: Matthew 7:1.

The verses at which we have now arrived begin a new section of our Lord's Sermon, and that it is by no means one of the simplest appears from the diverse treatment which it has received at the hands of the commentators. They are almost unanimous in allowing that our Lord's prohibition, "Judge not" cannot be understood in its widest possible latitude, yet as to how far and wherein it is to be modified there is little agreement. That Christ's forbidding us to exercise and pass judgment upon others cannot be taken absolutely few if any who are acquainted with the general tenor of God's Word would deny, yet as soon as they attempted to define its limitations a considerable variety of opinion would be expressed. This should at once warn us against coming to any hasty conclusion as to the meaning of Matthew 7:1 and guard us against being misled by the mere sound of its words. Yea, it should drive us to our knees, begging God to graciously subdue the prejudices of our hearts and enlighten our minds, and then diligently search the Scriptures for other passages which throw light upon the one now before us.

It is very necessary for our own personal good that we spare no pains in endeavouring to arrive at a right understanding of these verses, for it is to our own loss if we misapprehend any portion of Holy Writ. It will be to our own condemnation if we transgress this Divine Commandment, for unless its meaning is opened unto us we shall be at a loss to repel those who would bring us into bondage by the corrupt use they make of it. There are few verses quoted more frequently than the opening one of Matthew 7, and few less understood by those who are so ready to cite it and hurl it at the heads of those whom they ignorantly or maliciously suppose are contravening it. Let the servant of God denounce a man who is promulgating serious error, and there are those—boasting of their broadmindedness—who will say to him, "judge not, that ye be not judged." Let the saint faithfully rebuke an offender for some sin, and he is likely to have the same text quoted against him.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged." The word which is here rendered "judge" is one that occurs frequently in the New Testament, and it is used in quite a variety of senses. It is the one found in, "I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say" (1 Cor. 10:15), and in, "judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?" (1 Cor. 11:13), where "judge" means weigh carefully and form an opinion or consideration. It occurs in "thou (Simon, whom Christ asked "which of them will love Him most?") hast rightly judged" (Luke 7:43), where it signifies inferred or drawn a conclusion. It occurs in, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord" (Acts 16:15), that is, if you regard or account me so. "Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law" (John 18:31) means, "put Him on trial before your court." In Romans 14:3, "judge" has the force of despise, as is clear from the first member of the antithesis. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?" (John 7:51), where "judge" signifies condemn—its most common signification. Which or how many of these meanings the word "judge" has in our text must be carefully ascertained and not hastily or arbitrarily assumed.

Now the first thing to do when prayerfully studying a passage on which opinions vary is to examine its *context*, first its remote and then the immediate. In this instance the "remote" would be the particular portion of the Word in which it occurs, namely, the Sermon on the Mount. As we pass from one section to another in this Sermon it is very important that we bear in mind our Lord's dominant object and design therein, which was to show that He requires in the character

and conduct of His disciples something radically different from and far superior to that religion which obtained among the Jews, the highest form of which they regarded the scribes and Pharisees as possessing. The keynote was struck by Christ when He told His hearers, "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 5:20). That which precedes and all that follows to the end of His discourse is to be pondered and interpreted in the light of that statement.

In the earlier articles of this series we called attention frequently to what has last been pointed out, and it must not be lost sight of as we enter upon the present division of our Lord's address. That which pre-eminently characterized the Pharisees was the very high regard which they had for *themselves* and the utter contempt in which they held all who belonged not to their sect. This is evident from the words of Christ in Luke 18:9 where we are told, "He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"—in what immediately follows we have contrasted the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisees took it upon them to go up and down passing censorious and unjust judgment upon others, while blind to their own glaring faults. The disciple of Christ is to conduct himself in a manner exactly the reverse: unsparingly *judging himself* and refusing to invade the office of God where others are concerned.

The "more immediate context" of Matthew 7:1 is the verses which follow it. In order to obtain a right understanding of verse 1 it is important to recognize that the next four verses are inseparably connected with it, that the five together form one complete section treating of the same subject. The contents of verse 2 show plainly that we have a continuation of the theme of verse 1, while the "and" at the beginning of verse 3 and the "or" at the beginning of verse 4 denote the same thing, while verse 5 contains our Lord's application of the whole. The value of preserving the link between the later verses with the opening one lies in noting the threefold mention of "thy brother" in 3, 4, and 5 and in observing what is there said of his state and the state of the one who takes him to task. If these details be kept in mind we shall be preserved from making an erroneous interpretation and application of verse 1. As we must not too much anticipate what is to come we will leave these suggestions with the reader for him to ponder.

After carefully weighing both the remote and immediate context of our verse, our next task is to search the Scriptures for all other passages treating of or bearing upon the subject of judging others. It is most essential that we should do so if we are to be preserved from many erroneous ideas. Some statements of Holy Writ are presented in a very terse and contracted form, but elsewhere they are amplified and filled out: others are expressed in seemingly absolute terms, but elsewhere are modified and qualified. As an illustration of the latter, take the Fourth Commandment. The Sabbath day is to be kept holy: "in it thou shalt not do *any* work," yet from the teachings of Christ we know that works of piety, of mercy, and of necessity *are* lawful on that day. So it is with our present text: unless we are very careful in our interpretation of it we shall prohibit what is elsewhere required, and be found censuring that which other passages commend.

"The capacity of judging, of forming an estimate and opinion, is one of our most valuable faculties and the right use of it one of our most important duties. 'Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?' (Luke 12:57) says our Lord; 'judge righteous judgment' (John 7:24). If we do not form judgments as to what is true and false, how can we embrace the one and avoid the other?" (John Brown). It is very necessary that we have our "senses exercised to discern (Greek

“thoroughly judge”) both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14) if we are not to be deceived by appearances and taken in by every oily-mouthed impostor we encounter. It must not be thought that our Lord here forbade us to act according to the dictates of common prudence and to form an estimate of everything we meet with in the path of duty, nor even that He prohibited us from judging men’s characters and actions according to their avowed principles and visible conduct, for in this very chapter He *bids us* measure men by this rule, saying, “by their fruits ye shall know them” (v. 20), and many duties to others absolutely require us to form a judgment of men, both with respect to their state and their conduct.

Unless we form estimates and come to a decision of what is good and evil in those we meet with we shall be found rejecting the one and condoning the other. “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15): how shall we heed this injunction unless we carefully measure every preacher we hear by the Word of God? “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11): in order to obey this we are obliged to exercise a judgment as to what *are* “works of darkness.” “We command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6). This compels us to decide *who* is “walking disorderly.” “Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). This requires us to determine who is guilty of such things. Thus it is abundantly clear that our Lord’s prohibition in Matthew 7:1 is by no means to be taken absolutely.

There are four kinds of judging which are lawful and required by the Word: two public and two private. First, *ecclesiastical* judgment. This belongs chiefly to the minister, who in preaching God’s Word judges men by admonishing their sins, and in his private dealings he must be faithful to their souls and rebuke where necessary. The judgment of the church is exercised when it decides upon the credibility of the profession of one applying for membership. So, too, in the maintenance of discipline and exclusion of those who refuse to heed its reproofs. Second, *civil government*. This pertains to the magistrate, whose office it is to examine those charged with criminal offenses, giving judgment according to the laws of the land, acquitting the innocent, sentencing those proven guilty. Legitimate *private* judgment is first where one man in a Christian manner reprehends another for his sins, which is required by the Lord (Lev. 19:17). Second, where the grosser faults of notorious offenders are condemned and others informed thereof that they may be warned against them.

“Judge not.” That which is here forbidden is unlawful judging of our fellows, of which we will instance a variety of cases. First, *officiously* or *magisterially*, which lies outside the prerogative of the private individual: this is assuming such an authority over others as we would not allow them to exercise over us, since our rule is to be “subject one to another and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5). We are requited both by the law of nature (which includes rationality and prudence) and the Scriptures to judge of things, and persons, too, as we meet them in the sphere of duty—but to judge whatever lies *outside* of our path and province is forbidden. “Study to be quiet and to do your own business” (1 Thess. 4:11): if we give full and proper heed to this Divine precept we shall have little or no leisure left to pry into the affairs of others. That which our text prohibits is the passing beyond our legitimate sphere, the taking upon us to judge that which is

not set before us for judgment, intruding into the circle of others: "let none of you suffer . . . in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15).

Second, "judge not" *presumptuously*, which is done when we treat mere suspicions or unconfirmed rumours as though they were authenticated facts, and when we ascribe actions to springs which lie outside the range of our cognizance. To pass judgment on the *motives* of another, which are open to none save the eye of omniscience, is highly reprehensible, for it is an intrusion upon the *Divine* prerogative, an invading of the very office of God. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" (Rom. 14:4) places the Divine ban upon such conduct. A notable example of what is here interdicted is recorded in Job 1. When the Lord commended His servant unto Satan, saying, "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" The Evil One answered, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face" (vv. 8-11), suggesting that Job only served God for the gain thereof. Thus to presumptuously judge the *motives* of another is devilish!

Third, "judge not" *hypocritically*. This form of unlawful judgment was particularly before our Lord on this occasion, as appears from the verses which immediately follow. The one who is quick to detect the minor faults of others while blind to or unconcerned about his own graver sins is dishonest, pretending to be very precise while giving free rein to his own lusts. Such two-facedness is most reprehensible in the sight of God, and to all right-minded people, too. "Therefore thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Rom. 2:1). No matter what may be his social standing, his educational advantages, his religious profession, the one who is guilty of partiality, who censures in others that which he allows in himself, is inexcusable and self-condemned. That even true, yea, eminent saints, are liable to this grievous sin appears from the case of David, for when Nathan propounded the instance of the rich man sparing his own flock and seizing the one lamb of his poor neighbour's, David's anger was greatly kindled and adjudged the transgressor as worthy of death, while lying himself under guilt equally heinous (2 Sam. 12:1-11).

Fourth, "judge not" *hastily or rashly*. Before thinking the worst of any person we must make full investigation and obtain clear proof that our suspicions are well-grounded or the report we heard is a reliable one. Before the Most High brought upon the world the confusion of languages it is said that He "came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded" (Gen. 11:5), as though He would personally investigate their conduct before He passed sentence upon them. So again, before He destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me" (Gen. 18:21). Thus God would teach us that before we pass sentence in our minds upon any offender we must take the trouble of obtaining decisive proof of his guilt. We are expressly commanded, "judge not according to the appearance" (John 7:24) for appearances are proverbially deceptive. Always go to the transgressor and give him an opportunity to clear him-

self: "he that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Prov. 18:13).

Fifth, "judge not" *unwarrantably*, which is to go beyond the rule which is set before us. In God's Word certain things are commended, certain things condemned, yet there is another class of things on which the Scriptures pronounce no verdict, which we term "things indifferent," and to condemn anyone for using *such* things is to be "righteous over much" (Eccl. 7:16). It was for just such offenses that the Apostle reproved some of the saints at Rome who were sitting in judgment upon their brethren over different things as "meat and drink." So, too, he admonished the Colossians who were being brought into bondage by the, "Touch not, taste not, handle not of the commandments and doctrines of men" (2:20-23). The Holy Spirit points out that in such cases to judge a brother is to "speak evil of the Law" (James 4:11), which means that he who condemns a brother for anything which God has *not* proscribed, regards the Law as being faulty because it has not prohibited such things. "He who quarrels with his brother and condemns him for the sake of anything not determined in the Word of God, does thereby reflect on His Word, as if it were not a perfect rule" (Matthew Henry).

Sixth "judge not" *unjustly or unfairly*, ignoring everything that is favourable in another and fixing only on that which is unfavourable. It is often far from being an easy matter to secure all the materials and facts which in any case is necessary to form a judgment, yet to pronounce judgment without them is to run a serious hazard of doing another a cruel injustice. Many a one has rashly condemned another who, had he known all, might have approved or at least pitied him. Again, it is very unjust to censure one who has sincerely done his best simply because his effort falls short of what satisfies us. Much unjust judgment proceeds from a spirit of revenge and a desire to do mischief. When David sent his servants to comfort Hanun the king of Ammon upon the death of his father, that king suffered his nobles to persuade him that the servants of David were spies on an evil mission (2 Sam. 10): a horrible war was the outcome—behold how great a fire a little matter kindles!

Seventh, "Judge not" *unmercifully*. While on the one hand we are certainly not, as far too many today appear to think, obliged to regard one who holds fundamental error or one who is thoroughly worldly as a good Christian, yet on the other hand the law of charity requires us to put the best construction we can on doubtful actions, and never, without proof, ascribe good ones to evil principles or motives. God does not require us to call darkness light or evil good, nevertheless since we are so full of sin ourselves and so prone to err, we must ever be on our guard of calling light darkness and good evil. We are not to go about with our eyes closed nor wink at sin when we see it, yet it is equally wrong for us to hunt for something to condemn and seize upon every trifle and magnify molehills into mountains. We are not to make a man an offender for a word, nor harbour suspicions where there is no evidence. Many a one has condemned another where no ground for judgment existed out of personal jealousy and ill will, which is doing Satan's work. May the Lord graciously deliver both writer and reader from all these forms of unlawfully judging others.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.*23. In Flight.*

In passing from 1 Kings 18 to 1 Kings 19 we meet with a sudden and strange transition. It is as though the sun were shining brilliantly out of a clear sky, and the next moment, without any warning, black clouds draped the heavens and crashes of thunder shook the earth. The contrasts presented by these chapters are sharp and startling. At the close of the one, “the hand of the Lord was on Elijah,” as he ran before Ahab’s chariot. At the beginning of the other he is occupied with self and, “went for his life.” In the former we behold the Prophet at his best: in the latter we see him at his worst. There he was strong in faith and the helper of his people: here he is filled with fear and is the deserter of his nation. In the one he confronts the four hundred prophets of Baal undaunted: in the other he flees panic-stricken from the threats of one woman. From the mountain top he betakes himself into the wilderness, and from supplicating Jehovah that He would vindicate and glorify His great name to begging Him to take away his life. Who would have imagined such a tragic sequel!

In the startling contrasts here presented we have a striking proof of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. In the Bible human nature is painted in its true colours: the characters of its heroes are faithfully depicted, the sins of its noteworthy persons are frankly recorded. True, it is human to err, but equally true it is human to conceal the blemishes of those we most admire. Had the Bible been a human production, written by uninspired historians, they had magnified the virtues of the most illustrious men of their nation, and ignored their vices or if mentioned at all glossed over them and attempts made to extenuate the same. Had some human admirer chronicled the history of Elijah, his sad failure would have been omitted. The fact that it is recorded, that no effort is made to excuse it, is evidence that the characters of the Bible are painted in the colours of truth and reality, that they were not sketched by human hands, but that its historians were controlled by the Holy Spirit.

“And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:46). This is most blessed. The “hand of the Lord” is often used in Scripture to denote His power and blessing. Thus Ezra said, “the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy” (8:31). “The hand of the Lord was, with them: and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21). This word coming in here points an instructive sequel to what was before us in verse 42—there we beheld the Prophet cast down on the earth in self-abasement before God—here we see Him honouring and miraculously enduing His servant. If we would have the power and blessing of God rest upon us we must take a lowly place before Him. In this instance the “hand of the Lord” communicated supernatural strength and fleetness of foot to the Prophet, so that he covered the eighteen miles so swiftly as to overtake and pass the chariot: thus did God further honour the one who had honoured Him and at the same time supply Ahab with yet another evidence of Elijah’s Divine commission. This was illustrative of the Lord’s way: where there is a man who takes his place in the dust before the Most High, it will soon be made apparent before others that a power beyond his own energizes him.

“And he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” Each detail contains an important lesson for us. The power of God resting upon Elijah did not render him careless and negligent of his own duty: he gathered up his long loose garment so that his movements

might be unimpeded. And if we are to run with patience the race that is set before us we need to "lay aside every weight" (Heb. 12:1). If we are to stand against the wiles of the Devil, we must have our "loins girt about with Truth" (Eph. 6:14). By running "before Ahab" Elijah took the lowly place of a common footman, which should have shown the monarch that his zeal against idolatry was prompted by no disrespect for himself, but actuated only by jealousy for God. The Lord's people are required to "honour the king" in all civil matters, and here, too, it is the duty of ministers to set their people an example. Elijah's conduct on this occasion served as another test of Ahab's character: if he had any respect for the Lord's servant he would have invited him into his chariot, as the eminent Ethiopian did Philip (Acts 8:31), but it was far otherwise with this son of Belial.

Onward sped the wicked king toward Jezreel where his vile consort awaited him. The day must have been a long and trying one for Jezebel, for many hours had passed since her husband had gone forth to meet Elijah at Carmel. The peremptory command he had received from Jehovah's servant to gather all Israel together unto that mount, and the prophets of Baal as well, intimated that the crisis had been reached. She would therefore be most anxious to know how things had gone. Doubtless she cherished the hope that her priests had triumphed, and as the rain clouds blotted out the sky would attribute the welcome change to some grand intervention of Baal in response to their supplications. If so, all was well: her heart's desire would be realized, her scheming crowned with success, the undecided Israelites would be won over to her idolatrous regime and the last vestiges of the worship of Jehovah should be stamped out. For the troublesome famine Elijah was solely to blame: for the ending thereof she and her gods should have the credit. Probably such thoughts as these occupied her mind in the interval of waiting.

And now the suspense is over: the king has arrived and hastens to make report to her. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword" (1 Kings 19:1). The first thing which strikes us about these words is their noticeable omission: the Lord Himself was left out entirely. Nothing is said of the wonders He had wrought that day, how He had not only caused fire to come down from Heaven and consume the sacrifice and even the very stones of the altar, and how it had licked up great quantities of water in the trench around it; and how in response to the prayer of His servant, rain was sent in abundance. No, God has no place in the thoughts of the wicked, rather do they put forth their utmost efforts to banish Him from their minds. And even those who, from some form of self-interest take up with religion, and make a profession and attend the public services, yet to talk of God and His wondrous works with their wives in their homes is one of the last things we should find them doing. With the vast majority of professors, religion is like their Sunday clothes: worn that day and laid aside for the rest of the week.

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that *Elijah* had done." As God is not in the thoughts of the wicked, so it is the way of unbelief to fix upon secondary causes or attribute unto the human instrument what the Lord is the doer of. It matters not whether He act in judgment or in blessing, God Himself is lost sight of and only the means He employs or the instruments He uses are seen. If a man of insatiable ambition be the Divine instrument for chastising nations laden with iniquity, that instrument becomes the object of universal hatred, but there is no humbling of the nations before the One who wields that rod. If a Whitefield or a Spurgeon is raised up to preach the Word with exceptional power and blessing, he is worshipped by the religious masses and men

talk of his abilities and *his* converts. Thus it was with Ahab. First he ascribed the drought and famine to the Prophet—"art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (18:17), instead of perceiving that it was *the Lord* who had a controversy with the guilty nation and that he was the one mainly responsible for its condition; and now he is still occupied with what "Elijah had done."

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done." He would relate how Elijah had mocked her priests, lashed them with his biting irony, and held them up to the scorn of the people. He would describe how he had put them to confusion by his challenge, and how as if by some spell or claim had brought down fire from Heaven. He would enlarge upon the victory gained by the Tishbite, of the ecstasy of the people thereon, how they had fallen on their faces, saying "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God." That he recounted these things unto Jezebel not to convince her of her error, but rather to incense her against God's servant is clear from his designed climax: "and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." How this revealed once more what an awful character Ahab was: as the protracted drought with the resultant famine had not turned him unto the Lord, so this Divine mercy of sending the rain to refresh his dominion led him not to repentance. Neither Divine judgments nor Divine blessings will of themselves reclaim the unregenerate: nothing but a miracle of Sovereign grace can turn souls from the power of sin and Satan unto the living God.

It is not difficult to imagine the effect which would be produced upon the haughty, domineering and ferocious Jezebel when she heard Ahab's report: it would so hurt her pride and fire her furious temper that nothing but the speedy dispatch of the object of her resentment could pacify it. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me and more also if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (1 Kings 19:2). If Ahab's heart was unaffected by what had transpired on Carmel, remaining steeled against God, still less was his heathen consort softened thereby. He was sensual and materialistic, caring little about religious matters—so long as he had plenty to eat and drink, and his horses and mules were cared for—he was content. But Jezebel was of a different type: as resolute as he was weak. Crafty, unscrupulous, merciless, Ahab was but a tool in her hands, fulfilling her pleasure, and therein (as Rev. 2:20 intimates) she was a fore-shadowment of the woman riding the scarlet coloured beast (Rev. 17:3). This crisis was one of gravest moment, and policy as well as indignation prompted her to act at once. If this national reformation were permitted to develop, it would overthrow what she had worked for years to establish.

"So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" (1 Kings 19:2). Behold the implacable and horrible enmity against God of a soul that has been abandoned by Him. Utterly incorrigible, her heart was quite insensible of the Divine presence and power. Behold how that awful hatred expressed itself—unable to hurt Jehovah directly, her malice vents itself on His servant. It has ever been thus with those whom God has given up to a reprobate mind. Plague after plague was sent upon Egypt, yet so far from Pharaoh throwing down his weapons of rebellion, after the Lord brought His people out with a high hand, that wretch declared, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them" (Exo. 15:9). When the Jewish council beheld Stephen and "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" irradiated with heavenly glory, instead of receiving his message when they heard his words, "they were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth." And like so many

raging maniacs, “cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran on him with one accord and cast him out of the city and stoned him” (Acts 7:54-58).

Beware my reader of resisting God and rejecting His Word, lest you be abandoned by Him and He suffers your madness to hasten your destruction. The more it was manifest that God was with Elijah, the more was Jezebel exasperated against him. Now that she learned he had slain her priests, she was like a lioness robbed of her cubs. Her rage knew no bounds: Elijah must be slain at once. Boastful of the morrow, swearing by her gods, she pronounced a fearful imprecation upon herself if Elijah did not meet the Same end. This resolution of Jezebel’s shows the extreme hardness of her heart. It solemnly illustrates how wickedness grows on people. Sinners do not reach such fearful heights of defiance in a moment, but as conscience resists convictions, as light is continued to be rejected, the very things which should soften and humble come to harden, and make more insolent. And the more plainly God’s will is set before us the more will it work resentment in the mind and hostility in the heart—when it is but a short time until that soul is consigned to the everlasting burnings.

But see here *the overruling hand of God!* Instead of ordering her officers to slay the Prophet forthwith, Jezebel sent a servant to announce her sentence upon him. How often mad passions defeat their own ends, fury blinding the judgment so that prudence and caution are not exercised. Possibly she felt so sure of her prey that she feared not to announce her purpose. But future events lie not at the disposal of the creature, no matter what positions of worldly power is occupied by them. Probably she thought that Elijah was so courageous there was no likelihood of his attempting an escape: but in this she erred. How often God takes “the wise in their own craftiness” (Job 5:13) and defeats the counsels of the wicked Ahiothophels (2 Sam. 15:31)! Herod had murderous designs on the infant Saviour, but “being warned of God in a dream,” His parents carried Him down to Egypt (Matt. 2:12). The Jews “took counsel to kill the Apostle Paul,” but “their laying waits was known to him,” and the disciples delivered him out of their hands (Acts 9:23, 24). So here: Elijah is given warning before Jezebel wreaks her vengeance on him.

This brings us to the saddest part of the narrative. The Tishbite is notified of the queen’s determination to slay him: what was his response? He was the Lord’s servant, does he then look unto his Master for instruction? Again and again we have seen in the past how “the word of the Lord came” to him (1 Kings 17:2, 8; 18:1), telling him what to do. Will he now wait upon the Lord for the necessary guidance? Alas, instead of spreading his case before God, he took matters into his own hands; instead of waiting patiently for Him, he acts on hasty impulse, deserts the post of duty, and flees from the one who sought his destruction. “And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there” (1 Kings 19:3). Notice carefully the “*when he saw* that, he arose and went for his life.” His eyes were fixed on the wicked and furious queen; his mind was occupied with her power and fury, and therefore was his heart filled with terror. Faith in God is the only deliverer from carnal fear: “Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid.” “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee” (Isa. 12:2; 26:3), Elijah’s mind was no longer stayed upon Jehovah, and therefore fear took possession of him.

Hitherto Elijah had been sustained by faith’s vision of the living God, but now he lost sight of the Lord and saw only a furious woman. How many solemn warnings are recorded in Scrip-

ture of the disastrous consequences of walking by sight. "Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere" (Gen. 13:10) and made choice thereof: but the very next thing recorded of him is that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom!" The majority-report of the twelve men sent by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan was, "we *saw* the giants, the sons of Anak which come of the giants, and we were in our own *sight* as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:33). In consequence of which "all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night." Walking by sight magnifies difficulties and paralyzes spiritual activity. It was when Peter "*saw* the wind boisterous" that "he was afraid and began to sink" (Matt. 14:30). How striking the contrast between Elijah here and Moses, who "*by faith* he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible"(Heb. 11:27)—and nothing but the eye of faith fixed steadily upon God will enable anyone to "endure."

"And when he saw that, he arose, and went for *his life*"—not for God, nor for the good of His people—but because he thought only of self—the man who had faced the four hundred and fifty false prophets, now fled from one woman. The man who had been so faithful in the Lord's service now deserted his post of duty, and at a time when his presence was most needed by the people if their convictions were to be strengthened and the work of reformation carried forward and firmly established. Alas, what is man! As Peter's courage failed him in the presence of the maid, so Elijah's strength wilted before the threats of Jezebel. Shall we exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen?" No indeed, for that would be a very carnal and erroneous conception. The truth is that "it is only as God vouchsafes His grace and Holy Spirit that any man can walk uprightly. Elijah's conduct on this occasion shows that the spirit and courage he had previously manifested were of the Lord, and not himself—and that those who have the greatest zeal and courage for God and His truth, if left to themselves, become weak and timorous" (John Gill).—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

8. *Its Elucidation.*

For the sake of quite a number of friends who have waited many years for further help on the problem raised by the relation of man's inability to his responsibility, we feel we must devote one more article to this difficult but important (perhaps to some, abstruse and dry) aspect of our subject. Light thereon has only come to us, "here a little and there a little," for we, too, are a very dull scholar: but the measure of understanding now vouchsafed us, it is our duty to share with others. We have sought to show that the problem we are now wrestling with appears much less formidable when once the precise nature of man's impotency is properly defined—it is due neither to the absence of requisite faculties for the performance of duty, nor to any force from without which compels him to act contrary to his nature and inclinations. Instead, his bondage unto sin is a *voluntary* one: he freely chooses the evil. Second, it is a *moral* inability, and not physical or constitutional.

In saying that the spiritual impotency of fallen man is a moral one, we mean that it consists of *an evil heart*, of enmity against God. Man has no affection for his Maker, no will to please Him, but instead an inveterate desire and determination to please himself and have his own way, at all costs. It is, therefore, a complete misrepresentation of the facts of the case to picture fallen man as a being who *wishes* to serve God but who is *prevented* from doing so by his depraved nature—that he genuinely endeavours to keep His Law but is hindered by indwelling sin. The fact is that he ever acts *from* his evil heart and not *against* it. Man is not well disposed toward his Creator, but ill disposed. No matter what change is wrought in his circumstances, be it poverty to wealth, sickness to health, or vice versa, man remains a *rebel*—perverse, stubborn, wicked—with no desire to be any better, hating the light and loving the darkness.

It therefore follows that man's voluntary and moral inability to serve and glorify God is, third, a *criminal* one. As we have pointed out in previous articles, a wicked heart is a thing of an entirely different order from weak eyesight, a bad memory, or paralyzed limbs. No man is to blame for physical infirmities, providing they have not been self-indulged by sinful conduct. But a wicked heart is a moral evil, yea the sum of all evil, for it hates God and is opposed to our neighbours instead of loving them as we are requited. To say that the sinner cannot change or improve his heart is only to say he cannot help being a most vile and inexcusable wretch. To be unalterably in love with sin, so far from rendering it less sinful, makes it the more so. Surely it is self-evident that the more wicked a man's heart is, the more evil and blameworthy he is. The only other possible alternative would be to affirm that sin itself is not sinful.

It is because the natural man loves sin and hates God that he has no inclination and will to keep His Law but so far from that excusing him, it constitutes the very essence of his guilt. We are told that Joseph's brethren "hated him, and *could not* speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4). Why was it that they were unable to speak peaceably unto him? Not because they lacked vocal organs, but because they hated him so much. Was such inability excusable? No, in *that* consisted the greatness of their guilt. An Apostle makes mention of men "having eyes full of adultery, and that *cannot* cease from sin" (2 Peter 2:14). But was not their impotency a culpable one? Surely it was, for the reason they could not cease from sin was that their eyes were "full of adultery." So far from such an inability being an innocent one, it constituted the enormity of their crime—so far from excusing them, it made their sin the greater. Men must indeed be blind when they fail to

see that it is their moral impotency, their voluntary enslavery to sin, which renders them obnoxious in the sight of the Holy One.

A man's heart being fully set in him to do evil does not render his sinful actions the less criminal, but the more so. Consider the opposite: does, the *strength* of a virtuous disposition render a good action the less or the more praiseworthy? So far from God being less glorious because He is so infinitely and unchangeably holy in His nature that he "*cannot* be tempted with evil" (James 1:13) or act otherwise than in the most righteous and perfect manner, it constitutes the very excellence of the Divine character. Is Satan any less sinful and criminal because he is of such a devilish disposition, so full of unreasonable malice against God and men, as to be incapable of anything but the most horrible wickedness? So of humanity. No one supposes the want of a will to work excuses a man from it, as physical incapacity does. No one imagines that the covetous miser, with his useless hoard of gold, but who has no heart to give a penny to the poor, is for that reason excused from deeds of charity as though he had nothing to give.

How justly, then, may God still enforce His rights and demand loyal allegiance from men. God will not relinquish His claims because the creature has sinned, nor lower His requirements because he has ruined himself. Were God to command that which we ardently desired and truly endeavoured to do, but for which we lacked the requisite faculties, we should not be to blame. But when He commands us to love Him with all our hearts and we refuse so to do, then we are most certainly to blame, notwithstanding our moral impotency, because we still possess the necessary faculties for the exercise of such love. This is precisely what sin consists of: the want of affections for God with its suitable expression in obedient acts, the presence of an inveterate enmity against Him with its works of disobedience. Were God to grant rebels against His government the license to freely indulge their evil proclivities, that would be to abandon the platform of His holiness and to condone, if not endorse, the wickedness.

"There is no difficulty in seeing the reasons why God might address such commands to fallen and depraved men. The moral law is a transcript of God's moral perfections and must ever continue unchangeable. It must always be binding, in all its extent, upon all rational and responsible creatures, from the very condition of their existence, from their necessary relation to God. It constitutes the only accurate representation of the duty universally and at all times incumbent upon rational beings—the duty which God must of necessity impose upon and require of them. Man was able to obey this law, to discharge this whole duty, in the condition in which he was created. If he is now in a different condition—one in which he is no longer able to discharge this duty—this does not remove or invalidate his obligation to perform it. It does not affect the reasonableness and propriety of God, on the ground of His own perfections, and of the relation in which He stands to His creatures, proclaiming and imposing this obligation—requiring of men to do what is still as much as ever incumbent upon them" (W. Cunningham).

It has generally been lost sight of that the Moral law is not only the rule of *works*, but also of our *strength*. Inasmuch as well-being is the ground of well-doing—the tree must be good before the fruit can be—we are obliged to conclude that the Law is the rule of our *nature* as truly as it is of our deeds. "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy *might*" (Deut. 6:5). And observe that was said not only to unfallen Adam but also to his fallen descendants, and that the Saviour pressed the same—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy *strength*" (Luke 10:27)! The Law

not only requires us to love, but to have minds furnished with all strength *to love* God, so that there may be life and vigour in our love and obedience to Him. The Law requires no more love than it does strength, therefore if it did not require strength to love, it would require no love either. Thus it is plain that not only does God enforce His rightful demands upon fallen man, but also that He has not abated one iota of His requirements because of the Fall.

If the Divine Law said nothing more unto the natural man today than, “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with what strength thou now hast”—rather than with the strength He requires him to have and which He first gave unto him, so that both strength and faculty, love and its manifestation came under the command—it would amount to, “thou need not love the Lord thy God at all,” for thou art now “without strength” and therefore incapable of loving and serving Him, and art not to be blamed for having none. But as we have shown, man is *culpable* for his impotency, for the only reason why he loves not God is because his heart is still at enmity against Him. Did ever murderer plead at the bar of justice that he hated his victims so intensely that he could not go near him without killing him? If such were his acknowledgement, that only aggravated his crime and he stands condemned out of his own mouth. Hell, then, *must be* the only final place for inalienable rebels against God.

We should also call attention to the propriety of the Divine law being pressed upon fallen men in all the length and breadth of its requirements, both as a means of knowledge and a means of conviction, even though it is no longer available as a standard which is able to measure up to. In spite of his inability to render obedience to it, the Law serves to *inform* man of the holy character of God, the relation in which he stands to Him, and the duty which He still requires of him. So, too, it serves as an essential means of *convicting* men of their depravity. Since they are sinners, it is most important that they should be made aware thereof. If their duty be made clear, if they be bid to do that which is incumbent upon them, they are more likely to perceive how far short they come. If they are stirred up to endeavour a compliance with God’s requirements, a discharge of their obligations, they will discover their moral helplessness in a way more forcible than any sermons can convey.

In the next place let us point out that fallen man is responsible *to use means* both for the avoidance of sin and the performance of holiness. Though the unregenerate is destitute of spiritual life, yet they are not therefore mere machines, The natural man has a rational faculty and a moral sense which distinguishes between right and wrong, and those faculties he is called upon to exert. So far from being under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins, it is only because of deliberate perversity that any do so. The most profane swearer is able to refrain from his oaths when in the presence of someone he fears and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it would stand by him untasted from morning till night. Criminals are deterred from many offenses by the sight of a policeman, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. Thus self-control is not utterly outside man’s power.

“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away” (Prov. 4:14, 15). Is not the natural man capable of heeding such warnings? It is the bounden duty of the sinner to eschew everything which has a tendency to lead unto wrongdoing, to turn his back upon every approach unto evil and every custom which leads to wickedness. If we deliberately play with fire and are burned, the blame rests wholly on

ourselves. There is still in the nature of fallen man some power to resist temptation, and the more it be asserted, the stronger it becomes—otherwise there would be no more sin in yielding to an evil solicitation than there is sin in a tree being blown down by a hurricane. Moreover, God does not deny grace to those who humbly and earnestly seek it from Him in His appointed ways. When men are influenced to passion, to allurements, to vice, they are blamable and must justly render an account unto God,

No rational creature acts without some motive. The planets move as they are driven, and if a counter influence supervene, they have no choice but to leave their course and follow it. But man has a power of resistance which they have not, and he may strengthen by indulgence or weaken by resistance the motives which induce him to commit wrong. How often we hear of athletes voluntarily submitting to the most rigorous discipline and self-denial—does not that evince the natural man has power to refrain from self-indulgence when he is pleased to use it? Highly-paid vocalists abstaining from all forms of intemperance in order to keep themselves physically fit, illustrates the same principle. A heathen king took unto himself Sarah, but when God warned him that she was another man's wife, he touched her not. Observe carefully that the Lord said to him: "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her" (Gen. 20:6). Abimelech had a natural "integrity" which God acknowledged to be in him, though He also affirmed His own power in restraining him. If men did but nourish their integrity, God would concur with them to preserve them from many sins.

Not only is man responsible to use means for the avoidance of evil, he is also under binding obligations to employ the appointed means for the furtherance of good. It is true that the efficacy of means lies in the sovereign power of God and not in the industry of man, nevertheless He has established a definite connection between means and the end desired. God has appointed that bodily life shall be sustained by bodily food, and if a man deliberately starves himself to death he is guilty of self-destruction. Men still have power to attend upon the outward means, the principal of which are hearing the Word and engaging in prayer. They have the same feet to take them to church as conducts them to the theatre: the same ability to pray unto God as the heathen have to cry unto idols. Slothfulness will be reproved in the day of judgment (Matt. 25:26-30)—the sinner's plea that he had no heart for these duties will avail him nothing—he will have to answer for his contempt of God.

Because he is a rational creature, man has the power to exercise consideration: he does so about many things, why not about his soul? God Himself testifies to this power even in a sinful people: to His Prophet He said, "Thou shalt remove thy place to another place in their sight: it may be they will *consider*, though they be a rebellious house" (Ezek. 12:3). Christ condemned men for their failure at this very point: "Ye hypocrites ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves *judge ye not what is right?*" (Luke 12:56, 57). If men have the ability to take an inventory of their business, why not of their eternal concerns? Refusal to do so is criminal negligence. "All the ends of the world shall *remember and* turn unto the LORD" (Psa. 22:27): the natural man possesses the faculty of memory and is obligated to put it to the best use. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD" (Lam. 3:40): failure so to do is a willful negligence.

Man has not only physical organs, but affections or passions. If Esau could weep for the loss of his blessing, why not for his sins? Observe the charge which God brought against Ephraim. "They will not frame their doings *to turn* unto their God" (Hosea 5:4): they would entertain no thoughts nor perform any actions that had the least prospect toward reformation. The unregenerate are capable of considering their ways. They know they shall not continue in this life forever, and most of them are persuaded in their conscience that after death there is an appointed judgment. True, the sinner cannot save himself, but he can obstruct his own mercies. Not only do men refuse to employ the means which God has appointed but they scorn His help by fighting against illumination and conviction. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and *we would not hear*" (Gen. 42:21); "Ye do always *resist* the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

How can the natural man be held responsible to glorify God when he is incapable of doing so? Let us summarize our answers. First, sin has not produced any change in the essential relation between the creature and the Creator: nothing can alter God's right to command and to be obeyed. Second, sin has not taken away the moral agency of man, consequently he is as much a subject of God's moral government as he ever was. Third, since man still possesses faculties which are suited to the substance of God's commands, he is under binding obligations to serve his Maker. Fourth, the moral inability of man is not brought about by any external compulsion, for nothing outside of man imposes upon him any necessity of sinning: because all sin issues out of his own heart he must be held accountable for it. Fifth, man's servitude to sin was self-induced and is self-perpetuated, and since man freely chooses to do evil he is inexcusable therein. Sixth, man's inability is moral and not constitutional, consisting of enmity against and opposition to God, and therefore it is a criminal one. Seventh, because he refuses to use those means which are suited to lead to his recovery and scorns the helps which he is duty-bound to improve, he deliberately destroys himself.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that in spite of all the excuses proffered by the sinner in defense of his moral impotency and the outcries he makes against the justice of being required to render unto God that which lies altogether beyond his power, the sentence of his condemnation is articulated *within his own being*. Man's very conscience testifies to his responsibility and witnesses to the criminality of his wrongdoing. The common language of men under the lashings of conscience is: I might have done otherwise: O what a fool I have been! I was faithfully warned by those who sought my good, but I was self-willed. I had convictions against wrongdoing, but I stifled them. My present wretchedness is the result of my own madness: no one is to blame but myself. The very fact that men universally blame themselves for their folly establishes their accountability and evinces their guilt.—A.W.P.

GOD'S AGENCY IN WAR.

Does God punish nations for their wickedness under the Christian dispensation as He did during Old Testament times? If He did not we should have to discontinue the use of many of the Psalms in the praise of God. David often speaks of the righteousness of God's judgment against the nations, and if it were a glorious expression of the Divine justice in the days of old to punish guilty nations, why is it to be thought that He is now weary of exhibiting such specimens of the excellency of His administration? It is still true that the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment and that His holiness will be sanctified in righteousness. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ had not been long established in the world before a wrath came upon Judah to the uttermost, because that people had killed Jesus the Saviour, and slain the Prophets and Apostles whom He sent unto them (Matt. 22:7; 1 Thess. 2:16).

The book of the Revelation gives us a concise view of the series of Divine administration in the world under seven seals, seven vials, and seven trumpets—and it is plain that the calamities predicted under each were judgments to be inflicted upon the peoples for their iniquities. Under the fifth seal we find a complaint presented before God by the souls of them that were slain for His Word and for the testimony of Jesus. Under the sixth seal we find a prediction of tremendous revolutions announced against their persecutors. Under the trumpets awful judgments were inflicted on the nations for sins that are expressly named. After the sounding of the sixth trumpet it is said that the men which were not killed by these plagues, “yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, the idols of gold and silver,” etc. (Rev. 9:20, 21). When the third vial was poured out and the fountain of water became blood, John heard a voice saying, “Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments” (16:7). So, too, mystical Babylon is to be destroyed because she is “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”

But it may be objected: Is it not inconsistent with that humility which becomes such short-sighted creatures as we are to ascribe the particular transgressions which have kindled the Divine displeasure against those nations which are ruined by the agents of His providence? It would certainly be inconsistent with that reverence which we owe to God and that charity we owe to our fellow creatures to assign reasons for their calamities, when we are not authorized by the Word of God to do it. But the Scriptures plainly tell us what those offenses are which ordinarily bring down the displeasure of God on guilty nations, and they require us to give Him the glory due unto His works by observing and acknowledging His righteousness. Wise men who contemplate the works of nature inquire why the great Creator has given to various creatures different powers, propensities, and instincts. But how would they understand the wisdom and goodness of their Maker if they should, through an affected humility, disclaim all knowledge of His intentions in dispensing His gifts so variously? And how can we make that improvement of the works of the King of nations if we shut our eyes against that light by which we might judge of the reasons of His conduct?

The Scriptures tell us what those crimes were for which God spread desolation and misery over many countries in ancient times. If we knew that the same or the like crimes abounded in those countries which have recently been the theater of the judgments of Heaven, ought we not to be impressed with a new sense of that holiness which appears in the ways of the Lord and to learn righteousness when His judgments are on the earth? Our Lord censured those who thought

that the men on whom the tower of Siloam fell were greater sinners than others in Jerusalem. And we, too, would deserve severe censure if we should pretend to judge of the degree of criminality chargeable on any nation from the calamities which have befallen it. Those are not always the most wicked nations that are first or that are most awfully punished. The Chaldeans were the worst of the heathens, and yet they were the ministers of Divine Providence in the punishment of all the surrounding nations (Ezek. 7; Jer. 25).

The Sovereign Ruler of the earth gives no account of His matters, and we can claim no right to call Him to account. He has reasons worthy of Himself for His conduct when He extends His longsuffering to some persons or nations to a greater degree than He does to others less wicked. But while we give Him the glory of His sovereignty, we ought not to hide our eyes from the plain proofs which He is pleased to give us of His hatred of sin. The old lying Prophet who deceived the man of God of Judah and tempted him to eat bread when God had forbidden him to was undoubtedly a greater sinner than the Prophet whom he deceived, yet the longsuffering of God to that offender should not hinder us from admiring His wisdom and justice in punishing a good Prophet for his disobedience.

Many nations have been in our day (1810) brought very low. Several thrones have been subverted (by Napoleon). It is our duty to hear the voice of God in such tremendous dispensations calling upon us to learn righteousness from His judgments which are abroad in the earth. But how can we learn righteousness from them if we affect to be ignorant of a truth so often taught in the Bible—that fat lands are turned into barrenness and countries covered with desolation for the iniquities of those who dwell in them (Psa. 107; Amos 9). Far be from us to infer from the miseries of any nations the sins for which they are punished. This would be to imitate the reprobated conduct of Job's friends, who judged him to be a hypocrite and atheist because he suffered the most grievous afflictions from the Providence of God. But when we know that nations have greatly sinned against God, and that they have greatly suffered, we may justly infer that their sins were the cause of their sufferings. God's ways, like Himself, change not.

The New Testament Prophet speaks of vials full of the last Judgment to be poured out upon the Beast and his worshippers. When those vials are poured forth, praise is given to God by those who had escaped from infection: "great and marvelous are Thy works Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints, Who would not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name, for Thou only art holy for Thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:3, 4). Are we not taught in those words that the ground of God's quarrel with the Popish nations, when they shall be visited with His judgments, is to be made so manifest as to afford just cause for praise! Some may object, If by the worshippers of the Beast are meant Romanists, they cannot deserve grievous judgments for holding fast a religion which they had been taught by their fathers and which they sincerely believe is well-pleasing to God. Answer: the Israelites who revolted under Jero-boam believed the worship of idols was acceptable to the Lord, yet the error of their judgment did not shelter them from His vengeance.

The perversion of religion in Israel was accompanied by many other vices which were so many causes of God's wrath against them. And are not the errors of Popery equally inimical to good morals? It is a pernicious deceit to suppose it is of no great consequence what men believe if their morals are good. Our faith ought to be pure as well as our morals, and corruptions in faith never fail to have an immoral tendency. Woe be unto us, who abhor the errors of Popish nations,

and yet are perhaps as bad in many respects as they are, and in some respects worse. Our sins are greatly aggravated by the superior advantages that we enjoy. We have been wonderfully preserved from threatened judgments—let us not be high-minded, but fear. God does what He pleases but His justice as well as His mercy endures forever.

There are other reasons beside the punishing of guilty nations for which God makes use of His battle-axe and weapons of war, in the destructive work for which they are fitted. By the revolutions accomplished in the world He gives striking manifestations to mankind of the vanity and instability of all earthly things, and of the infinite difference between those glories of the world which so much dazzle the eyes of beholders, and the glory of His own eternal throne. We walk too much by sight, and not by faith. When we see men elevated to uncommon heights of power we almost think they are immortal. When we behold cities enriched by commerce or the spoils of enemies, surrounded with strong fortifications and defended by mighty armies, we almost think they are eternal cities, as Babylon and Rome were once thought to be by their inhabitants, and perhaps by their enemies, too. When a kingdom has stood long in its strength we are ready to dream that such kingdoms are everlasting.

Thus we are tempted to give those honours to men and sublunary things which are due only to Him who lives forever and ever. By the fall of mighty kingdoms and the subversion of thrones, we are made not only to see but feel the folly of trusting in princes, of bestowing excessive admiration on earthly grandeur, and of looking more at things seen and temporal than those which are eternal. When the day of the Lord is upon the cedars of Lebanon, the oaks of Bashan and the ships of Tarshish, His intention is that the things which are great and high in the eyes of short-sighted men may be brought low, that the Lord alone may be exalted. Thus when the Prophet predicted the destruction of the glorious city of Tyre—the London of those days—he assigned this reason for God's awful purpose against that city: "The LORD of hosts hath purposed it to stain the pride of all glory to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth" (Isa. 23:9).

We ought certainly to mourn when God punishes guilty nations for the misery of our fellow creatures and for the indications which He gives us of His displeasure against them. But if we believe the world is governed by the providence of Him who sees what is past and to come at one glance, we ought not to confine our views of the works of God to their present appearance but to remember that what He is now doing tends to something else, which in His time He will show who is the blessed and only Potentate, and that in His whole administration He keeps in view ends worthy of His wisdom and grace. Generations may indeed pass away one after another before those glorious results appear to men which are well known beforehand to the all-seeing Eye. We ought to satisfy ourselves with the well-grounded assurance that all the glorious things which are spoken of the City of our God shall be fulfilled, that not one good thing said or here shall fail. He will bring light out of darkness and life out of death.

Perhaps we are too dim-sighted to see how those revolutions which bring so much misery and desolation can contribute to the good of mankind in their remoter consequences. We can however see how the prosperity of nations only too often tends to the increase of vice by giving opportunities to men to gratify their lusts. In such cases sore calamities are necessary for checking the progress of wickedness and *forcing them*, if they will not be virtuous, to set at least some bounds to their vices. History shows how the power of kings has often been employed to obstruct

the progress of the Gospel, and therefore the destruction of their powers makes a way for the free course of the Lord's Word. Former revolutions have been made instrumental in the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ in ways that no human sagacity could have foreseen or conjectured. When the mystery of God is finished we shall see more clearly how He has brought a clean thing out of an unclean.

Another thing taught by our text (Jer. 51:20) is that when God is pleased to bring about awful revolutions in kingdoms He ordinarily makes use of *men* for His instruments. By so doing He shows forth His glory as the universal Lord, who rules not only in the raging of the sea but in the tumults of the people. It is His glory to make use of wicked dispositions and the unholy works of the worst of men for the accomplishment of His purpose. He makes the wrath and pride of man to praise Him. The robber, the murderer, the destroyer of nations are His servants. While they are, to the utmost of their power, doing the work of His great enemy, yet they are accomplishing His holy counsels. It is very wonderful in our eyes that the will of God should be fulfilled even by His greatest enemies: thereby He magnifies His righteousness as the Governor of the world, not suffering wickedness either in individuals or nations to pass unpunished.

But what is most astonishing in this view of the Divine Providence is that even God's works of *grace* are carried on, not only in defiance of all the opposition that is made to them, but *by means* of the worst actions of wicked men and devils. Nebuchadnezzar, by the revolutions which he accomplished in many countries, prepared the way for the diffusion of the Gospel when it should be preached to the Gentiles. He scattered the Jews, the only nation that knew the true God, many of whom never returned to their own land. Thereby the Gentiles in many lands had some seeds of true religion scattered among them, which were to bring forth an abundant increase in days to come. It might easily be shown that all the great revolutions of the past contributed their part to the happy success of the Gospel in later times, and we have no reason to doubt that the present shaking of nations will have like consequences, although we cannot name the time or the manner in which the Lord will finish His "strange work" in righteousness and mercy.

The *variety* of God's works is no inconsiderable part of their glory. David praises Him in strains of rapture for the endless variety of His works of nature. He is no less worthy of praise for the wonderful variety of His works in the moral government of the world. It will at least be clearly seen that both when He is pleased to destroy nations by His own immediate agency (as at the Flood) or by employing human instruments, He acts in a manner most conducive to the fulfillment of His purposes. If He had punished all those guilty nations that had made themselves obnoxious to His justice by fire from Heaven, the history of mankind must have been completely different from what it is, and many works had been left undone which are the objects of high praise in the Psalms and in the prophetic writings of the Old and New Testaments.

Let us now draw some practical reflections from our text. 1. We learn one great advantage to be derived from history. When we survey the works of nature we lose the chief part of the pleasure and advantage which we might derive from the view if we forget they are the works of God. Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun, but this pleasure is greatly heightened and turned to devotion when we hear the voice of the heavens declaring the glory of God and the firmament showing His handiwork. So, too, we deprive ourselves of the richest advantage which history affords if we do not remember that the events which it records are the wondrous works of Him who is perfect in wisdom.

We are rightly saddened when we read of the fall of mighty empires and the carnage which has often been spread by the sword of the warrior. But we should remember that the sword of war is the sword of the Lord: that He mustereth the hosts of battle—that when mighty conquerors go forth they are the instruments of His Providence for accomplishing those overturnings which for wise ends He determined before any of us were born. With the same disposition we should read or hear the accounts which we receive daily of those events which are now happening in the world. Let us not forget that all men and their actions are under the superintendence of One who never errs. “I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isa. 45:7). If we hear of awful events we ought to admire that Providence which will bring order out of confusion and make darkness light to them that love Him.

There were heretics of old who confessed that all rational creatures were made by God but vile and noxious ones were made by the Devil. You are perhaps amazed that such foolish notions should enter the minds of men, but is it not equally unreasonable to suppose that the Providence of God is active only in the good and not in the wicked actions of men, that our blessings come from Him, but our calamities proceed from no higher course than some principle of evil? It is exceedingly dishonouring of God to suppose that any sin can be committed without His permission or any calamity befall men or nations that was not appointed for them in His eternal purpose.

2. Give unto God the glory of the awful dispensations of His Providence towards sinful nations. In Psalms 50, 105, 106, 135 we find praise is given to God for His judgments upon guilty people which shows that there is a Divine excellency in such works, which excellency we are to gladly acknowledge. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is devoted unto an exposure of the vanities and vexations which cleave to every earthly enjoyment. In the Lamentations God’s people are taught to consider their distresses as a chastisement from the Almighty. Behold the desolations which He has wrought in the earth, and know that He is a just God as well as a Saviour. Though slow to anger, He is great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked. When you see the desolation He has wrought in the earth be still and know that He is God. He will be exalted among the nations.

While we give Him glory as the God to whom vengeance belongs, let us not forget that *mercy* which He remembers in the midst of wrath. There is mercy to mankind even in those terrible calamities which bear hardest on our spirits when worse evils are prevented thereby and when we have reason to believe that good will result from them. The casting away of the Jews has brought salvation unto the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11). What would have been the consequence if God had suffered wicked nations to walk age after age in their own ways without sending some of His terrible judgments to check the progress of sin? The world would scarcely have been habitable through that excessive wickedness which would have overspread the nations. If men are not generally reformed by the judgments of God, they are at least incapacitated to be so wicked as they might otherwise be. What would be the state of any nation if there were no magistrates to punish crime? And what would the world become if the King of nations suffered their wickedness always to remain unpunished? Admire, then, the wisdom of Him who brings good out of evil.—G. Lawson.

SPIRITUAL CONTENTMENT.

Yours I received, and return many thanks to you for your kindness and prayers. I am blind, but bless the Lord, I am content. All that He doth is wise and just—all that comes in His will is welcome. His choice is better than mine. Eyes might have blinded, but blindness shall enlighten me. God hath not cast me off, but called me aside into the invisible world. There Jesus Christ is the only sun. Mercy is a sea of infinite sweetness for faith to bathe in. The promises are as green pastures of comfort: God Himself is the dew that makes a spring of graces in the heart. Heavenly truths are the firmament over our heads. The pure air is the Holy Spirit breathing in saints and ordinances. In this world the blind have a prospect, and may see the land afar off, which lieth beyond the line of time in another world. I may say it is good being here: I cannot see outward things, but the new creature is a better sight than all the world. I cannot read the letters in the Bible, but I have the quickening Spirit. It is enough.

The veil is upon my eyes, but my work is to rend off the veil of time from my heart, and look into eternity; to put back all creatures, and to have all in God, eyes and all; and this is the greatest possession. If I have all things in themselves, I have them but in a finite sphere; but if I have them all in God, I have them eminently, and in a kind of infinity. In waiting, I wait upon the Lord, till He incline and give me eagles' wings of faith and love, to soar up to Him. Near enough to Him I cannot be. O that I were unearthed and unselfed, that my soul might be in perpetual ascensions to Him, my love going out in raptures after Him! O for the circumcision of the heart! If the film were off mine eyes, I should see the outward world; but if the flesh were *off my heart*, I should love the blessed God, which is infinitely better.—E. Polhill, after he was blinded.

