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LICENTIOUS PREACHING.

In the preceding articles we have treated of a legal and licentious spirit as they exist in and are exercised by the individual: on the present occasion we shall show how they are manifested in preaching, but before doing so we will seek to dispose of a difficulty. It may be thought strange that two elements so diverse as legality and lawlessness should meet in the same person, for while it is true that the one predominates much more than the other in different men, yet the roots of both are found in everyone and the Christian needs to watch against each alike. The explanation of this anomaly we believe is this: Truth is *twofold* and as the heart of man is radically opposed by nature to the Truth his antagonism thereto breaks forth in two distinct directions. This was exemplified by our Lord when He said, "Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling to one another, and saying, We have *piped* unto you, and ye have *not danced*; we have *mourned* unto you, and ye have *not wept*" (Luke 7:31, 32): neither the one nor the other suited them; they despised both alike.

The twofoldness of Divine Truth is broadly illustrated by the dividing of God's Word into its two Testaments, wherein, characteristically speaking we have set forth the Divine Law and the Divine Gospel, and where distinctively (though not exclusively) God is revealed respectively as "Light" and "Love." This same twofoldness of Truth appears in each of those grand objects and subjects, though this is far from being as clearly apprehended as it should be. The Law which God gave unto Israel was a dual one, consisting of the Moral and the Ceremonial: the Moral Law specially exemplifying God's *righteousness* and the Ceremonial Law His *grace*—the merciful provision which He made and which was available for those who came under the condemnation of the former. In like manner, the Gospel contains a dual manifestation of the Divine character and perfections: while it is "the Gospel of the *grace* of God" (Acts 20:24) proclaiming the free favour of God to the undeserving, it is also denominated "the ministration of *righteousness*" (2 Cor. 3:9) and "the Word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13). Paul declared, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ . . . for therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed" (Rom. 1:16, 17).

In view of this twofoldness of Truth and the opposition of the carnal mind thereto, it should no more surprise us that such diverse elements as legality and lawlessness are found in the same persons than we should be to read that Pilate and Herod, who "were at enmity between themselves," on the day of our Saviour's mock trial before them "were made friends together" (Luke 23:12), and that they *made common cause* in opposing and condemning Him. Legality is the perverting of God's Law. Lawlessness or licentiousness is the corrupting of the Gospel: or if we speak of these evils as they apply to the distinctive features of each, legality is the wresting of the righteous element in both the Law and the Gospel, while licentiousness is the abuse of the *grace* element in them. While it is true that grace is the outstanding and predominant characteristic of the Gospel, yet it must ever be insisted upon that it is not a grace which is exercised at the expense of righteousness, rather does it reign "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21).

Now since it is true that the roots of both legality and licentiousness are found in every man by nature, it behooves the servant of God to be on his most prayerful and careful guard against giving place to either of these evils, for in proportion as he does so the

Truth is falsified and the souls of his hearers are poisoned. If he is guilty of preaching in a legalistic way, the person and work of Christ is dishonoured and the spirit of self-righteousness is fed those who sit under him. Unless he makes it crystal clear that none but Christ can avail the sinner and that there is in Him a sufficiency to meet his every need—unless he expresses himself beyond a doubt of being misunderstood that the merits of Christ's righteousness and blood are the sole means for delivering a believing sinner from the curse of the broken Law and his singular title to everlasting bliss—he has failed at the most vital point of his mission and duty. The trumpet he is called upon to blow must give forth no uncertain sound at this point: nothing but faith in the finished work of Christ, and nothing added thereto, can supply any sinner with a standing before the thrice holy God.

On the other hand, it is equally important and essential that the minister steer clear of the opposite extreme. If he is guilty of preaching in a licentious way then the person and work of Christ is equally dishonoured and the spirit of religious bolshevism is fostered in his hearers. Unless he makes it as plain as an object bathed in the light of the midday sun that God hates sin, all sin, and will not compromise with or condone it in anyone—unless he declares and insists that Christ came to save His people from their sins—from the love of them, from the dominion of them—he has failed at the most essential part of his task. The great work of the pulpit is to press the authoritative claims of the Creator and Judge of all the earth—to show how short we have come of meeting God's just requirements, to announce His imperative demand of repentance. The sinner must throw down the weapons of his rebellion and forsake his evil way before he can trust in Christ to the saving of his soul. Christ is to be received as King to rule over him as well as Priest to atone for him, to surrender to Him as his rightful Lord ere he can embrace Him as his gracious Saviour.

Such a task as we have briefly outlined above is no easy one, and only those who are called and qualified by God are fitted to discharge it. To preserve the balance of Truth so that the requirements of righteousness and the riches of grace are equally poised, to avoid Arminianism on the one side and Antinomianism on the other is an undertaking far beyond the capacity of any "novice" (1 Tim. 3:6). It requires a "workman" and not a lazy man—a student and not a slothful one—who studies to "show himself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 9:15) and not one who seeks the applause and the shekels of men. Nor can any human education or self-development of the intellectual faculty impart this capacity. No indeed: only in the school of Christ can this accomplishment be acquired. Only as the Holy Spirit is his Teacher can any man be furnished unto such an undertaking. The preacher must first be taught himself, taught experimentally and effectually, taught in his soul to love what God loves and hate what God hates, and then be given wisdom from Above to express the same according to the Scriptural pattern before he is ready to show unto others the way of Life.

It is because so many untaught men, unregenerate men, now occupy the pulpits that "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6) is being so widely and generally disseminated. Multitudes who have neither "tasted that the Lord is gracious" nor have "the fear of the Lord" in them, have from various motives and considerations invaded the sacred calling of the ministry and out of the abundance of their corrupt hearts they speak. Being blind themselves, they lead the blind into the ditch. Having no love for the Shepherd they have none for the sheep, being but "hirelings." They are themselves "of the world" and therefore

“the world heareth them” (1 John 4:5), for they preach that which is acceptable unto fallen human nature and as like attracts like, they gather around themselves a company of admirers who flatter and support them. They will bring in just enough of God’s Truth to deceive the unwary and give an appearance of orthodoxy to their message, but not sufficient of the Truth, especially the *searching* portions thereof, to render their hearers uncomfortable by destroying their false peace. They will *name* Christ but not *preach* Him, *mention* the Gospel but not *expound* it.

Some of these men will preach legality under the pretense of furthering morality and honouring the Divine Law. They will preach up good works, but lay no foundation upon which they may be built. They confound justification and sanctification, making personal holiness to be the ground of the sinner’s acceptance before God. They sow their vineyard with “divers seeds” (Deut. 22:9) so that Law and Gospel, Divine grace and creature performances are so mingled together that their distinctive characters are obliterated. Others preach licentiousness under the guise of magnifying the grace of God. They omit the Divine call to *repentance*, say nothing about the necessity of forsaking our sins if we are to obtain mercy (Prov. 28:13), lay no stress upon regeneration as a being made “a new creature in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), but declare that the sinner has simply to accept Christ as his personal Saviour—though his heart be still proud, without contrition and thoroughly in love with the world—and eternal life is now his. The result of this preaching is well calculated to bolster up the deluded for instead of insisting that saving faith is evidenced by its spiritual fruits, instead of teaching that the Christian life is a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil, and that none but the overcomer will reach Heaven, they are assured—no matter how carnal their walk—that “once saved, always saved,” and thus they are soothed in their sins and comforted with a false peace until they awake in Hell. Shun all such preaching, my reader, as you would a deadly plague. “Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge” (Prov. 19:27).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

22. *Seeking Grace*: Matthew 7:7, 8.

It is often helpful to compare parallel passages with each other, for the very variations in them are found to be complementary and supplementary to one another. Markedly is this the case in connection with the four Gospels. The passage which is now before us in Matthew 7 is found also in Luke 11. There the context is a different one, and it is instructive to ponder the same. Luke 11 opens with one of the disciples asking the Lord, "Teach us to pray." This request is not made by a stranger but by one of His own followers, signifying that believers need to be Divinely *taught* this sacred art if they are to supplicate aright. This is a very humbling truth for the proud heart of man. Prayer, which is the simplest and most spontaneous exercise of a Christian's soul, is nevertheless an art which he is not by nature competent to perform. Nor can any human school qualify him for this holy task. None but the Lord can teach him—experimentally and effectually—how to obtain the ear of God and call down showers of blessing upon himself and others. O that both writer and reader may be made to feel his deep need in this matter!

Nor let it be supposed that this request, "Lord, teach us to pray," is suited only to the case of a babe in Christ. True, it is a most appropriate and necessary petition for young believers to present, yet there is less need of *urging it upon them* than there is upon some of their older brethren. Alas, how often added years are accompanied by increased pride and self-sufficiency. How many who have the gift of gab, a ready flow of language and are quick to memorize the expressions which others use in their devotions would be hurt if you suggested that they had need to cry, "Lord, teach us to pray." Yet such is the case: the oldest and most experienced saint has need to be shown the way of the Lord more perfectly: "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). Growth in grace is not evidenced by growth in haughtiness, but in increased humility. The most deeply taught believer is the one most conscious of his need of teaching: a large part of wisdom consists of consciousness of ignorance.

The Lord answered this request of His disciple by graciously furnishing a brief directory and pattern, which we like to think of as the Family Payer. Then He appeared to anticipate a question: will God really answer us? What is the actual design of this holy exercise? Is it only designed for our inward good or does it really bring down blessings from above? Does it end with the benefit it works in us or does it truly move the hand of God? The reply, though in the form of a parable, is expressed with great clearness and force. As importunity does most surely affect men, so earnestness and persistency is certain to gain an answer from God. It is not a vain thing to supplicate the Mercy-seat: our prayers are not lost on the air or expended merely upon ourselves. Asking is attended with receiving, seeking with finding and knocking leads to opening. There is a connection established between Divine decree and believing prayer, between the requests that ascend from earth and the mercies which descend from Heaven.

It seems strange that so many have missed the meaning of that plain parable in Luke 11. "And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me and I have nothing to set before him. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is

he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (vv. 5-8).

Now there is something more taught us in that parable than the need for and value of perseverance in prayer, namely, *encouragements* to be earnest therein. Let us analyze its details. Why was the one sought unto displeased at the request presented to him? Because it was made not by a close relative, but simply a friend. Because the suppliant was not asking on his own behalf, but for someone else. Because it was presented at a most inopportune and inconvenient hour. Because it concerned not an urgent and pressing need, but simply a matter of some bread. Who would think of waking up someone at midnight in order to borrow food for another? Christ shows us the natural disposition of our selfish hearts under such circumstances: "Trouble me not . . . I cannot rise and give thee"; yet because the request was repeated and the suppliant would not accept a refusal, for the sake of importunity and not that of friendship, the petitioner gained his request.

Though the specific conclusion was not here formally drawn by Christ—as it is in verse 13—how blessed it is for faith to do so. The One whom the Christian supplicates is more than a "friend," namely, his Heavenly Father. So far from there being any reluctance in Him to supply the varied needs of His children, He "giveth liberally to all and upbraideth not" (James 1:5). Nor can we come to Him at any inopportune season, for He "slumbereth not neither is weary": at all times we may address the Throne of Grace. Moreover it is our privilege to spread before Him our smallest needs. We would hesitate to ask a man of prominence and importance for a mere trifle, knowing he would be loath to be bothered therewith, but "*in everything* by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God" is the royal invitation (Phil 4:6) issued to the saint. Nor is it only our own needs we are to be concerned with: those of our friends also we may beg the Lord to relieve: thereby, we honour Him acknowledging Him to be Ruler over all, the universal Supplier.

Then our Lord plainly declared, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9-10) which is precisely the same as our present portion in Matthew's Gospel. If the going to a mere friend at an inopportune time and asking for material bread for another received a favourable answer, how much more will our heavenly Father, to whom there are no inconvenient seasons, grant spiritual succour to His own dear children! Here is the heart of God revealed as the ready and bounteous Giver, whose fullness cannot be exhausted and whose word to His people is, "open thy mouth *wide* and I will fill it" (Psa. 81:10). A wide door is here opened to the whole family of God, possibilities of blessing which we can scarcely conceive, free leave to covet earnestly the best things. No matter how enlarged our expectations may be, they cannot exceed the bounty of the Lord.

But does this mean that the Christian may ask for anything he pleases and God stands pledged to grant the same? Are those absolute promises without any qualification? No, for first, they are limited by our own unbelief, by the meagerness of our faith which we impose upon them. And second, they are restricted by God's benignity: the only guard He has placed upon these promises is that He will give us nothing save that which is really for our "good" (Matt. 7:11). And how thankful we should be for this! In our ignorance and shortsightedness we often ask God for that which would be for our-ill, but in His mercy God withholds it. Not so does He act with the wicked. Unbelieving Israel asked

for flesh in the wilderness and God granted their request, “but while their meat was in their mouths the wrath of God came upon them” (Psa. 78:30, 31). A later generation desired a king and he was given them “in His anger” (Hosea 13:11). So, too, the demons had their request granted that they might enter into the herd of swine (Matt. 8:31, 32).

It is most important that the above-noted qualification be kept in mind, for in some quarters the crudest ideas obtain on this subject. Taking Matthew 7:7, 8 at its face value some have deduced the absurd principle that we may have anything we please from God for the mere asking, providing we ask in faith, and by “asking in faith” they signify only a working themselves up to a firm persuasion they shall have their petitions granted. But that one phrase, “give good things to them that ask Him,” at once disposes of such fanaticism. To “ask in faith” requires that we lay hold of and plead before God one of His own promises: it is not an expectation that He will grant everything we may demand, but an assurance He will bestow whatsoever He is pledged to give. “If we ask anything according to His will—not our will, but His, as it is revealed in Holy Writ—He heareth us” (1 John 5:14), and we only ask “according to His will” when we ask in faith for those things He knows will be for our good.

“Prayer is a simple, unfeigned, humble, ardent opening of the heart before God, wherein we ask things needful or give thanks for benefits received” (John Bradford, the Martyr). And what is it which the Christian, every Christian, is most urgently and constantly in need of, without which it is impossible to improve or use aright all other benefits and privileges? Is it not *Divine grace*: renewing grace, enlightening grace, empowering grace, sanctifying grace? What is knowledge worth unless it is sanctified to us? What do talents amount to unless they are spiritually directed? And for this grace we are to “ask”: ask from a felt sense of want, trustfully supplicating God for the supply thereof. For that grace we are to “seek”: seek with care and diligence, as that which is missing and lacking, and which is felt to be of great value. For that grace we are to “knock”: that is, ask and seek, with earnestness and constancy, pressing our suit with fervour and persistence, persevering notwithstanding delays, oppositions and disappointments. Continuing in prayer till our request is granted.

There is an “asking” which is mere formality and accomplishes nothing: if the suppliant himself is scarcely able to remember an hour afterward that which he petitioned for, how can he expect to receive answers! If an experienced mother knows the difference between a child’s asking for the mere sake of asking and making request out of a sense of urgent need, how infinitely less can we impose upon the Omniscient One. So also there is a “seeking” which is merely mechanical and obtains not: half-heartedness and slothfulness is not likely to be successful. We take very little pains in seeking for something we regard as a mere trifle, but when an object is valued highly and prized dearly then we hunt for it with real diligence. Yet something more than earnest asking and diligent seeking is required: “knocking” suggests an intensification of the one and a continuation of the other. If at first we don’t succeed, then try, try again. What a word is that: “Ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and *give Him no rest*” (Isa. 62:6, 7)!

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance” (Eph. 6:18). The walls of Jericho did not fall down the first time they were encompassed, nor did the beloved Apostle obtain comforting assurance from the Lord the first or the second time that he besought Him for the removal of the thorn in his flesh. So far from it’s being a wrong thing for a Christian to make repeated requests

for the same object, it is required of him that he be importunate. If it is enquired, *Why* does God require such importunity from His people? Several answers may be given. First and negatively, it is not that we have to overcome any reluctance on God's part, for He is more ready to give than we are to seek blessings from Him—yea to do for us far more exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Still less is it because He would tantalize us: "therefore will the LORD wait, that He may be gracious" (Isa. 30:18).

From the positive side, second, that we may give *proof of our earnestness*. When someone makes request of us for anything and we find that a single refusal is sufficient to get rid of him, we conclude he was not very eager for it. But suppose a business man arrives late at his office and his chief clerk announces that a stranger has sought an interview, that he could not put him off, that he has waited for hours determined to gain his quest—then it is clear that he is eager and intent. Such intensity and perseverance is pleasing unto the Lord as when a soul can say with Jacob, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26)—success is sure. "Ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

Such importunity is required for *the testing of our faith*. An unbelieving heart is soon discouraged—either opposition from man or delay on the part of God and the spirit of prayer is speedily quenched. Not so with the trusting one; faith reassures the soul, bidding it, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD" (Psa 27:14). How the faith of the Canaan woman was tried. First she cried, "Have mercy on me O Lord," and we are told, "He answered her not a word." Then His disciples interposed and besought Him to send her away. Next He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But nothing daunted her—she renewed her petition, "Lord, help me": to which Christ replied, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Yet even that did not dismay her: having asked and sought, she continued knocking, begging for the "crumbs." "O Woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee, even as thou wilt" (Matt. 15:28) was the triumphant outcome!

Such importunity is necessary for *the developing of our patience*. How sadly impatient we are! how angry when our wills are crossed! what fearful rebellion lurks and works in our hearts! Truly we are "like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," fretful and resentful at every restriction placed upon the fulfillment of our desires. But patience must have her perfect work, and it is the trying of our faith which "worketh patience" (James 1:3). Real faith is not destroyed by God's delay: it knows He waits to be gracious, and therefore its possessor is enabled to "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD" (Lam. 3:26). When Elijah had prayed that the long drought should be ended he bade his servant go and look for the first portent of the coming rain. When he returned saying, "there is nothing," his master replied, "Go again seven times" (1 Kings 18:43). Thus, by the proving of our earnestness, the testing of faith and the developing of patience, our souls are the better fitted to receive and can the more appreciate the Lord's answer when it is vouchsafed.

But it is not for himself, only, that the Christian is to earnestly, diligently and persistently seek Divine grace, but *for his brethren* also. That is one reason why we referred to the parallel passage in Luke 11, where these Divine promises are immediately prefaced by the parable of one seeking the loaves on behalf of a needy friend. The lesson should be too plain to miss: because he was unable to personally supply that need, even though it was midnight, he went out and supplicated another on his friend's behalf. Immediately

following this Christ says: "Ask—on the behalf of your friend—and it shall be given you." Be just as earnest in asking, just as diligent in seeking, just as importunate in knocking for grace to be given unto your needy brethren and sisters in Christ as you are in seeking it for yourself. They are bought with the same precious Blood, and are members of the same Family, and thus they have pressing claims upon your affections; and their need of Divine grace to cleanse, to illumine, to fructify and sanctify—is as real, as great, and as urgent, as yours.

Ah, is it not at this very point we fail so lamentably? Is not our praying far too self-centered? Is there any wonder it is so ineffectual? If I am so little concerned about the spiritual well-being of my brethren and sisters at large, need I be surprised that the Lord refuses me the grace which I seek for my own soul? God will not put a premium upon selfishness. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication *for all saints*" (Eph. 6:18). Yes, not merely for myself and family, or for my own church and denomination, but for all the children of God which are scattered abroad. And this, not in a mere general way and only once a week, but as definitely and diligently, fervently and constantly, as I present my own personal needs before the Throne of Grace. This is one of the chief lessons inculcated by the prayer Christ taught His disciples: "when ye pray, say *our* Father which are in Heaven . . . give *us* . . . forgive *us* . . . deliver *us*"!

"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). And how can our love be better expressed than by making *their* case and cause *our own* case and cause before the Mercy-seat! "Epaphras . . . always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12). Ah, if we had more like Epaphras, Zion would not long remain in its present languishing condition. If each of God's people earnestly, trustfully and daily cried unto Heaven on behalf of the whole Household of faith that feeble knees might be strengthened, backsliders reclaimed, graces quickened, fruitless branches purged, half-dead preachers revived, we should soon witness showers of blessing descending on the parched Vineyard. God has not changed: His arm is not shortened: the promises of Matthew 7:7, 8 are as available to faith now as they were on the day of Pentecost. It is affections that have waned—the footstool of prayer which has been neglected. "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

Was there ever a time when prayer for the Church collectively, and its members individually was more urgently needed than now? We need to frequently remind ourselves that the most striking deliverances wrought in the past for God's people are recorded chiefly as monuments of prevailing prayer. Such was the salvation of Israel at the Red Sea—wrought in response to the supplication of Moses (Exo. 14:15). Such was the victory over Amalek at Rephidim (Exo. 17:8-13); the discomfiture of the Philistines in the days of Samuel—the "Ebenezer" then erected was less a monument of victory over powerful enemies than of the Prophet's prevailing prayer (1 Sam. 7:5, 9, 12). Also the overthrow of the Moabites and Ammonites in the days of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 10:1-13); the remarkable deliverance from Sennacherib king of Assyria (Isa. 37:15-20, 35, 37). Such examples of Jehovah's readiness to show Himself strong on the behalf of those who count upon His intervention are recorded for our encouragement. Then Ask, Seek, Knock.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

29. *His Recovery.*

The failure of Elijah had been of a very different character from that of Jonah's. It does not appear that he had done any moral wrong in quitting Jezreel, rather was his conduct in line with Christ's direction to His disciples: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another" (Matt. 10:23). They were not to expose themselves rashly to danger, but if they could do so honourably, avoid it and thus preserve themselves for future service—as numbers of our Reformers and members of their flocks took refuge on the Continent in the days of wicked Queen Mary. God had given Elijah no express order to remain at Jezreel and continue the work of reformation, and "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). It was more a case the Lord's testing His servant with "circumstances," leaving him to himself to show us what was in his heart, allowing him to exercise his own judgment and follow his own inclinations. Had there been something more involved than this, had the Prophet been guilty of deliberate disobedience, the Lord's dealings with him at Horeb would have been quite different from what they were.

What has been said above is not for the purpose of excusing Elijah but to view his fault in due perspective. Some have unfairly magnified his failure—charging him with that which cannot justly be laid to his account. We certainly believe he made a lamentable mistake in deserting the post of duty to which "the hand of the Lord" had brought him, for he received no word from his Master to leave there. Nor can we justify his petulance under the juniper tree and his request for the Lord to take away his life—that is for Him to decide, and not for us. Moreover, the question put to him twice at Horeb, "What doest thou here Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9, 13), evidently implied a gentle rebuke: yet it was more an error of judgment which he had committed than a sin of the heart. He had felt at liberty to exercise his own discretion and to act according to the dictates of his own feelings. God permitted this that we might know the strongest characters are as weak as water the moment He withdraws His upholding hand.

We have already seen how tenderly Jehovah dealt with His erring servant in the wilderness. Let us now admire the grace He exercised toward him at Horeb. That which is to be before us reminds us very much of the Psalmist's experience: the Lord who was his Shepherd had not only made him to lie down in green pastures, but, he acknowledged, "He restoreth my soul" (23:2, 3). The One who had refreshed and fed His servant under the juniper tree now recovers him from his useless repinings, reclaims him from his wanderings and raises him to a position of honour in His service. Elijah was incapable of restoring himself and there was no human being who could have delivered him from the Slough of Despond, so when there was no other eye to pity him, the Lord had compassion upon him. And is it not thus, at some time or other, in the experience of all God's servants and people? He who first delivered us from an horrible pit continues to care for us and when we wander from Him restores our souls and leads us back into the paths of righteousness.

"And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus" (1 Kings 19:15). "The Prophet was bemoaning the failure of all his efforts to glorify God, and the obstinate determination of his people to continue in their apostasy. It was thus he spent his time in the cave at Horeb, brooding over his disappointment, and lashing himself by reflecting upon the conduct of the people. A solitary place, with nothing to do might be congenial with such a disposition; it might foster it, but would never heal it:

and thus Elijah might have succumbed to a settled melancholy or raving madness. The only hope for persons in such circumstances is to come out from their lonely haunts and to be actively employed in some useful and benevolent occupation. This is the best cure for melancholy: to set about doing something which will require muscular exertion, and which will *benefit others*. Hence God directed Elijah to quit this present lonely abode which only increased the sadness and irritation of his spirit—and so He gave him a commission to execute a long way oft” (John Simpson).

“And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus” (v. 15). This is the course God takes when He restores the soul of one of His erring people—causing him to retrace his steps and return to the place of duty. When Abraham left Egypt—whither he had gone “down” in the time of famine: Genesis 12:10—we read that “he went on his journeys from the south to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning” (Gen. 13:3). When the church at Ephesus “left her first love” Christ’s message to her was, “Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4-5). So now Elijah is required to go back the way he had come, through the wilderness of Arabia, which was part of the course he would traverse on his way to Damascus. This is still God’s word to His strayed sheep: “*Return*, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause Mine anger upon you, for I am merciful” (Jer. 3:12).

When Peter repented of his great sin the Lord not only forgave him, but recommissioned His servant: “Feed My sheep” (John 21:16). So here the Lord not only restored the Prophet’s soul but appointed him to fresh work in His service. “And when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria” (1 Kings 19:15). This was a high honour for Jehovah to confer upon Elijah, such as He had bestowed upon Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). How gracious is our God! how patiently He bears with our infirmities! Observe how these passages teach that it is not by the people but by God that kings reign (Prov. 8:15). “There is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God” and therefore does He require of us, “let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Rom. 13:1). In this “democratic” age it is necessary that ministers of the Gospel should press this truth: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man *for the Lord’s sake*: whether it is to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers” (1 Peter 2:13, 14). Said the Apostle to Titus, “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates” (3:1).

“And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel” (1 Kings 19:16). None can reign except those whom God makes kings, and they only so long as He pleases. This “anointing” or unction proclaimed their Divine designation of this office and the qualification with which they should be endowed for their work. The Lord Jesus, who was “anointed with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38) united in Himself the offices of Prophet, Priest and King: the only persons ordered to be anointed in the Scriptures.

Infidels have raised an objection against our present verse by pointing out that Jehu was anointed not by Elijah but by a young Prophet under the direction of Elisha (2 Kings 9:1-6). This objection is capable of being disposed of in two ways. First, Jehu may have been anointed *twice*, as David was (1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4): or, as “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples)” (John 4:1, 2), so Jehu is said to be anointed by Elijah because what took place in 2 Kings 9 was according to *his orders*.

“And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be Prophet in thy room” (1 Kings 19:16). Here was an additional favour bestowed upon Elijah—that he should have the almost unique honour of ordaining his successor. That which had so quenched the Tishbite’s spirit was the failure which attended his efforts: no impression seemed to be made on the idolatrous nation, he only appeared to be concerned about the glory of the Lord God, and now his own life was imperiled. How his heart must have been comforted by the Divine assurance that another was appointed to carry on the mission he had prosecuted so zealously! Hitherto there had been none to help him, but in the hour of his despondency God provides him with a suitable companion and successor. It has ever been a great consolation to godly ministers and their flocks to think that God will never lack instruments to conduct His work, that when *they* are removed *others will* be brought forward to carry on. One of the saddest and most solemn features of this degenerate age is that the ranks of the righteous are so depleted and scarcely any are being raised up to fill their places. It is this which makes the outlook doubly dark.

And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay” (v. 17). Elijah had wrought faithfully but Israel had to be dealt with by other agents too: the three men whom he was told to anoint would in their turn bring down judgment upon the land. God was infinitely more jealous of His own honour than His servant could be and He would by no means desert His cause or suffer His enemies to triumph as the Prophet feared. But mark the *variety* of the instruments which God was pleased to employ: Hazael, king of Syria; Jehu, the rude captain of Israel; and Elisha, a young farmer. Each was as different as possible and yet each one was needed for some special work in connection with that idolatrous people at that time. Ah, “the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the face, I have no need of you” (1 Cor. 12:21). Yea, as some of the smaller and frailer members of the body perform the most useful and essential offices, so it is often by the most unlettered and apparently unqualified men that God accomplishes the chief exploits in His kingdom.

We may also perceive here how God exercises His high sovereignty in the instruments He employs. Neither Hazael nor Jehu were pious men: the former came to the throne by foully murdering his predecessor (2 Kings 8:15), while of the latter we read, “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam” (2 Kings 10:31). It is often His way to make use of wicked men to thrash those who have enjoyed but spurned particular favours at His hands. It is indeed remarkable how the Most High accomplishes His purpose through men whose only thought is to gratify their own evil lusts. True, their sin is neither diminished nor condoned because they are executing the decrees of Heaven. Nevertheless, though they are held fully accountable for the evil, they do only that which God’s hand and counsel determined before to be done, serving as His agents to inflict judgment upon His apostate people. But in view of the recent articles on “The Divine Agency in war” there is no need for us to enlarge upon this point.

“And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay, and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay” (1 Kings 19:17). Unspeakably solemn is this. Though God bears “with much longsuffering” the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, there is a limit to His patience. “He, that being often reprov’d hardened his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29:1).

Long had God endured that horrible insult to His majesty, but the worshippers of Baal should shortly discover that His wrath was as great as His power. They had been faithfully warned: for three and a half years there had been a fearful drought and famine upon their land. A notable miracle had been wrought on Carmel but only a fleeting impression had been made on the people. And now God announces that the "sword" shall do its fearful work, not mildly but thoroughly, until the land was completely purged of this great evil. And this is placed on record for all succeeding generations to ponder! The Lord has not changed: even as we write, His judgments are upon most of the world. O that the nations may heed His voice ere it is too late!

"Yet I will leave Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). On this verse we take decided exception to the interpretation given to it by the great majority of the commentators who see in it a Divine *rebuke* unto the Prophet's dark pessimism, supposing it was God's reply to his despondent "I only am left," when in reality there was a multitude in Israel who refused to join in the general idolatry. For several reasons we cannot accept any such view. Is it thinkable that there could actually be thousands in Israel who remained loyal to Jehovah and yet the Prophet be totally unaware of their existence? Little surprise to find one writer of note saying, "It has often been a subject of wonder to me how those seven thousand secret disciples could keep so close as to be unknown by their great leader: the odor of a rose will always betray its presence, hide it as we may"—but he creates his own difficulty. Moreover such a view is quite out of harmony with the context: why, after bestowing honour upon the Prophet should the Lord suddenly reprove him?

The careful reader will observe that the marginal reading opposite, "Yet I have left Me seven thousand," is, "Yet *I will* leave Me seven thousand." The Hebrew allows of either, but we much prefer the latter, for it not only removes the difficulty of Elijah's ignorance (which the former necessarily involves), but it accords much better with the context. The Lord was graciously *comforting* His despondent servant. First, the Lord informed the Prophet that another should take his place and carry on his mission. Next He declared He was by no means indifferent to the horrible situation but would shortly make quick work of it in judgment. And now He assures him that though summary judgment should be visited upon Israel yet He would not make a full end of them, but would preserve a remnant for Himself. Nor does Romans 11:4 in anywise conflict with this, providing we change the word "answer" to "oracle" (as the Greek requires!), for God was not replying to an objection, but making known to Elijah things to come.

It will thus be seen that we take an entirely different view from the popular interpretation not only of verse 18 but of the whole passage. Every writer we have consulted regards these verses as expressing the Lord's displeasure against a refractory servant, that He dealt with him in judgment, *setting him aside* from the honoured position he had occupied by appointing Elisha in his stead. But apart from the gentle rebuke implied in His question, "What doest thou here Elijah?" there is nothing to signify the Lord's displeasure, but much to the contrary. Rather do we regard these verses as a record of God's comforting answer to the Prophet's despondency. Elijah felt that the forces of evil had triumphed: the Lord announces that the worship of Baal should be utterly destroyed (1 Kings 19:17 and cf. 2 Kings 10:25-28). Elijah grieved because he "only was left": the Lord declares, "I will *leave* Me seven thousand in Israel." So desperate was the situation

they sought to take the life of Elijah: the Lord promises that Elisha shall complete his mission. Thus did Jehovah most tenderly silence Elijah's fears and reassure his heart.

In connection with the verses which have been before us, we like to link those words of Christ to His Apostles, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends *for* all things that I have heard of My Father I have *made known* unto you" (John 15:15)—indicative of the intimate fellowship enjoyed with Him. Thus it was with Elijah. The Lord of Hosts had condescended to make known unto him things to come, which certainly had not been the case if Elijah were estranged from Him. It was like what we read in Genesis 18:17 "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" No, He did not, for Abraham was "the *friend* of God" (James 2:23). Blessed indeed is it to see how the Lord had restored Elijah's soul to the most intimate communion with Himself: recovering him from his gloom and reinstating him in His service.

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him" (1 Kings 19:19). Here is good evidence that the Lord *had* restored the soul of His servant. Elijah raised no objection, made no delay, but responded promptly. Obedience must ever be the test of our relations with God: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). In this instance it involved a difficult journey of some hundred and fifty miles—the distance between Horeb and Abelmeholah (1 Kings 19:16 and cf. 4:12)—most of it across the desert; but when God commissions it is for us to comply. There was no jealous resentment that another should fill his place: as soon as Elisha was encountered, Elijah cast his mantle upon him—indicative of his investiture with the prophetic office and a sign of friendship that he would take him under his care and tuition. So indeed the young farmer understood it, as is evident from his response.

"And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and I will follow thee" (1 Kings 19:20). The Spirit of God moved him to accept the call, so that he at once relinquished all his worldly expectations. See how easily the Lord can stir men up to undertake His work in the face of great discouragements. "Had he consulted with flesh and blood, he would have been very unwilling to be in Elijah's situation, when thus hunted in those dangerous times, and when there was nothing but persecution to be expected. Yet Elisha chose to be a servant to a Prophet rather than master of a large farm, and cheerfully resigned all for God. The power of Divine grace can remove every objection and conquer every prejudice" (Robert Simpson). "And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?" (v. 20). Very beautiful is this: there was no self-importance, but rather total self-renunciation. Like John the Baptist who came in his *spirit*: (Luke 1:17), he was sent to usher in another, and his language here was tantamount to "he must increase, I must decrease." Blessed humility.

"And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah and ministered unto him" (1 Kings 19:21). What a lovely finishing touch to the picture. Certainly Elisha did not look upon Elijah as one who had been set aside by the Lord! What comfort for the Tishbite to now have for his companion one of so dutiful and affectionate disposition; and what a privilege for this young man to be under so eminent a tutor! And what is the next reference to him in Scripture? This, "and the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Go down to meet

Ahab king of Israel” (1 Kings 21:17, 18): how completely that disposes of the popular idea that God had discarded him from His service. Plainly he had been thoroughly reinstated and was back again on the same old terms with his Master. That is why we have entitled this article “His Recovery.”—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

3. *Its Nature.*

We propose dealing with this theme, and particularly with that aspect of it which is now to be before us, in rather a different manner than that which was followed by most of the Calvinistic divines in the past; or rather, we propose to throw most of our emphasis upon another angle of it than what they did. Their principal object was to establish this truth by rebutting the error of Arminians, who insist that those who have been redeemed by grace and regenerated by the Holy Spirit may nevertheless totally and finally apostatize from the Faith, and so eternally perish. Our chief aim will rather be to counteract the crude manner in which this doctrine has been only too often handled in more recent times and the evil use to which an adulterous generation has put it. While Arminianism has by no means disappeared from Christendom, yet it is the more recent inroads of Antinomianism (the repudiation of the Divine Law and the turning of God's grace into lasciviousness) which have wrought the most damage in our own lifetime.

It is not sufficiently realized by many of the Lord's own people that far more harm than good is likely to be done by immature "Gospellers" who have more zeal than knowledge, and who expect to reap a harvest (secure "results") before the ground is plowed and harrowed. Many an ignorant evangelist has given his hearers the impression that once they "accept Christ as their personal Saviour" they need have no concern about the future, and thousands have been lulled into a fatal sleep by the soothing lullaby "once saved, always saved." To imagine that if I commit my soul and its eternal interests into the hands of the Lord henceforth relieves me of all obligation is to accept sugar-coated poison from the Father of Lies. When I deposit my money in the bank for safe custody, then my responsibility is at an end: it is now their duty to protect the same. But it is far otherwise with the soul at conversion—the Christian's responsibility to avoid temptation and shun evil, to use the means of grace and seek after good lasts as long as he is left in this world.

If our ancestors erred on the side of prolixity—their descendants have often injured the cause of Christ by their brevity. Bare statements, without qualification or amplification, are frequently most misleading. Brief generalizations may content the superficial who lack both the incentive and the patience to make a thorough examination of any subject, but those who value the Truth sufficiently to be willing to "buy" it (Prov. 23:23) appreciate a detailed analysis. Their contemplation thereof enables them to obtain an intelligent and balanced grasp of an important Scriptural theme. The man who accepts a piece of money—be it of paper or metal—after a cursory glance is far more likely to be deceived with a counterfeit than he who scrutinizes it closely. And they who give assent to a mere summarized declaration of this doctrine are in far greater danger of being deluded than the ones who are prepared to carefully and prayerfully examine a systematic exposition thereof. It is, of course, for the latter we write.

Much confusion and misunderstanding has been caused through failure to clearly define terms. Those who assail this doctrine usually set up a "man of straw" and then suppose they have achieved a notable victory because so little difficulty was experienced in demolishing so feeble an object. It must be confessed that only too often those who have posed as the champions of the Truth are largely to blame for this. It needs little argument to demonstrate that one who is in love with sin and drinks in iniquity like water does not have his face Heavenwards, no matter what experience of grace he claims to have had in

the past. Yet it must not be concluded that the Arminian has gained the day when he appeals to the Christian's spiritual instincts and asks: Does it comport with God's holiness for Him to own as His dear child one who is trampling upon His commandments? The Calvinist would return a negative reply to such an inquiry as promptly and emphatically as would his opponent.

"The righteous also shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9). As Spurgeon pertinently pointed out, "The Scripture does not teach that a man will reach his journey's end without continuing to travel along the road; it is not true that one act of faith is all, and that nothing is needed of daily faith, prayer and watchfulness. Our doctrine is the very opposite, namely, that the righteous shall hold on his way: or, in other words, shall continue in faith, in repentance, in prayer, and under the influence of the grace of God. We do not believe in salvation by a physical force which treats a man as a dead log, and carries him whether he will it or not towards Heaven. No, "he holds on his way," he is personally active about the matter, and plods on up hill and down dale till he reaches his journey's end. We never thought that merely because a man supposes that he once entered on this way he may therefore conclude that he is certain of salvation, even if he leaves the way immediately. No, but we say that he who truly receives the Holy Spirit, so that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not go back, but persevere in the way of faith . . . We detest the doctrine that a man who has once believed in Jesus will be saved even if he altogether forsook the path of obedience."

In order to define our terms we must make it quite clear *who* it is that perseveres and *what* it is in which he perseveres. It is the saints, and none other. This is evident from many passages of Scripture. "He will keep the feet of *His saints*" (1 Sam. 2:9). "For the LORD loveth judgment and forsaketh not His saints: *they* are preserved forever" (Psa. 37:28). "He preserveth the souls of His saints: He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (Psa. 97:10). "He maketh intercession for the saints" (Rom. 8:27). "He shall come to be glorified in His saints" (2 Thess. 1:10). All such are preserved in God's love and favour and accordingly they persevere in the Faith, eschewing all damnable errors. They persevere in a life of faith, clinging to Christ like a drowning man to a life-buoy. They persevere in the path of holiness and obedience, walking by the light of God's Word and being directed by His precepts—not perfectly so, nor without wandering, but in the general tenor of their lives.

Now a "saint" is a sanctified or separated one. First, he is one of those who were chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world and predestinated to be conformed unto the image of His Son. Second, he is one of those who were redeemed by Christ, who gave His life a ransom for them. Third, he is one who has been regenerated by a miracle of grace, brought from death unto life, and thereby set apart from those who are dead in sin. Fourth, he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption. But *how may I know* whether or not I am a saint? By impartially examining myself in the light of Holy Writ to see if I possess the character and conduct of one. A "saint" is one whose back is toward the world and his face toward God. A saint's affections are drawn unto things above. He yearns for communion with his Beloved; he grieves over that in himself which displeases God. He makes conscience of his sins and confesses them to God; he prayerfully endeavours to walk as becomes a Christian, but who daily mourns over his many offenses.

Only those persevere unto the end who have experienced the *saving grace of God*. Now grace is not only a Divine attribute inherent in His character, it is also a Divine principle which He imparts to His people. It is both objective and subjective. Objectively, it is that free favour with which God eternally and unchangingly regards His people. Subjectively, it is that which He communicates to their souls, which resists their native depravity and enables them to hold on their way. A saint is one who not only has “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8), but who has also received “abundance of grace” (Rom. 5:17)—“unto every one of us is grace given” (Eph. 4:7). The Lord “giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6) and His grace is an operative, influential, and transforming thing. The Lord Jesus is “full of grace and truth” and of His fullness do all His people receive “and grace for grace” (John 1:14, 16). That grace teaches its recipients “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12). They come to the Throne of Grace and “find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16) and thereby prove the Divine declaration, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9).

From all that has been pointed out above it follows that when we affirm the final perseverance of the saints we do *not* mean, 1. That every *professing* Christian will reach Heaven. The sprinkling of a few drops of water on the head of an infant does not qualify it for the inheritance of the saints for in a few years’ time that child is seen to be no different than others who received not this ordinance. Nor does an avowal of faith on the part of an adult demonstrate him to be a new creature in Christ. Many born of Papist parents have been convinced of the folly of bowing before idols, confessing their sins to a priest and other such absurdities, but conversion to Protestantism is not the same as regeneration, as many evidenced in the days of Luther. Many a Jew has been convinced of the Messianic claims of Jesus Christ and has believed on Him as such, yet this is no proof of saving grace, as John 2:23, 24 and John 6:66 plainly show. Thousands more have been emotionally stirred under the hypnotic appeals of evangelists and have “taken their stand for Christ” and “joined the church,” but their interests quickly evaporated and they soon returned to their wallowing in the mire.

2. Nor do we mean that *seeming* grace cannot be lost. Satan is a clever imitator so that his tares are indistinguishable by men from the wheat. By reading theological works and sitting under the preaching of the Word an attentive mind can soon acquire an intellectual acquaintance with the Truth and be able to discuss the mysteries of the Gospel more readily and fluently than can an unlettered child of God. Keen mentality may also be accompanied by a naturally religious disposition which expresses itself in fervent devotions, self-sacrificing effort and proselytizing zeal. But if such an one relapses and repudiates the Truth, that does not overthrow our doctrine: it simply shows he was never born of God. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they *would* have continued with us” (1 John 2:19). Such characters had never been received into the fellowship of apostolic assemblies unless they gave credible appearances of possessing real grace, yet their subsequent departure was proof they had it not. “Whosoever hath not (in reality), from him shall be taken away even that which he *seemeth* to have” (Luke 8:18).

3. Nor do we mean that *initial and preparatory* grace is a guarantee of glorification. What percentage of blossoms on the apple and plum trees mature and bear fruit? And that is an adumbration in the natural of what is found in the spiritual realm. Many a promising

bud is nipped by the frosts of spring and never develops into a flower. In like manner there is a large number who so far from despising and rejecting it, "receive the Word with joy, yet hath not root in himself, but dureth from a while" (Matt. 13:20, 21). That was the case when Christ Himself sowed the Seed, and many a faithful servant of His has found the same thing duplicated in his own ministerial labours. How often has he seen the buds of promise appearing in the lives of some of his young people, only to be saddened later by the discovery that their "goodness was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it went away" (Hosea 6:4)? "Ye were willing *for a season* to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35) said Christ of certain ones who sat under the preaching of His forerunner. But observe He declared not that they had "sorrowed unto repentance."

Blazing comets and meteors are soon spent and fall from the heavens like lightening, but the stars keep their orbits and stations—as do the spiritual "stars" held fast in Christ's right hand (Rev. 2:1). There is an initial grace which produces a real but transient effect, and there is a saving grace which secures a permanent result. Hebrews 6:4, 5 supplies a solemn illustration of the former. There we read of those "who were once enlightened," that is, whose minds were illumined from on High, so that they perceived clearly the excellence of Divine things. They "tasted of the heavenly gift," so that for a season they lost their relish for the things of the world. They "were made partakers of the Holy Spirit," being convicted by Him of their sins and brought to say with Balaam, "let me die the death of the righteous" (Num. 23:10). But thorns sprang up and choked the good Seed, so that they "bring (forth) no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:14). Such are cast forth "like an untimely birth."

4. Nor do we mean that true grace *if left in our hands* would not be lost. If Adam and Eve, when left to themselves, lost their innocence, how much more would those who are still affected by indwelling sin destroy themselves did not the Lord renew them in the inner man "day by day"? (2 Cor. 4:16). Regeneration does not make the Christian a God— independent and self-sufficient. No, it unites him as a branch to the true Vine, as a member of Christ's mystical body. And just as a bough detached from the tree immediately withers and as an arm or leg cut off from its body is a lifeless thing, so would the saint perish if it were possible to sever him from the Saviour. But the believer is not his own keeper—"your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3)—declares the Apostle. At the new birth our self-righteousness received its death wound so that we were glad to look outside ourselves to the righteousness of Another, and the more we grow in grace the more conscious are we of our weakness and the more are we made "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

5. Nor do we mean that true grace may not be *hindered in its operations* and suffer a relapse. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit" (Gal. 5:17): being contrary the one to the other, there is ever a warfare going on between them, one being uppermost today and the other so tomorrow. Christian perseverance is to be gauged not so much from single actions as by the most regular habits of the soul. As the functions of body may be hindered by a swoon or fit, as the activities of the mind are impaired by delirium, so the stirrings of indwelling grace may be interrupted by the power or our natural corruptions. The more the saint yields to the solicitations of the flesh, the feebler become the workings of the principle of grace. That true grace may suffer a serious, though not fatal relapse appears in the cases of Noah, Abraham, David and Peter, which are recorded for our warning and not for our imitation. The health of soul varies as does that of body and as the latter is

frequently the consequence of our own carelessness and folly, such is always the case in connection with the former.

Nor do we mean that *the comforts* of true grace cannot be eclipsed. We may indeed lose the sense of it though not the substance. Communion with Christ is lost when we experience a fall by the way, yet union with Him is not severed thereby. Mutual comforts may be suspended between man and wife though the conjugal knot is not dissolved. Believer may be separated from Christ's smile yet not so from His heart. If they wander from the Sun of righteousness how can they expect to enjoy His light and warmth? Sin and wretchedness, holiness and happiness are inseparably joined together. The way of the transgressor is hard, but peace and joy are the portion of the upright. As a parent suffers his child to scorch his fingers at the flame that he may learn to dread the fire, so God permits His people to lose their comforts for a season that they may prove the bitterness of sin. But He draws them back again unto Himself before they are destroyed thereby.

7. Nor do we mean that the presence of indwelling grace renders it unnecessary that its possessor should persevere. Yet this is one of the silly inferences which Arminians are fond of drawing. They say, "If it is absolutely certain that God will preserve His people from total apostasy, then there is no real need why they must persevere—as well might we argue that it is unnecessary for us to breathe because God gives us breath, or that Hezekiah needed no longer to eat and drink because God had promised he should live another fifteen years. Wherever saving grace is bestowed it is accompanied by "the spirit of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7) so that the soul is preserved from trifling with God or reasoning like a madman. Christians are called upon to work out their own salvation "with fear and trembling," not to conduct themselves recklessly and to enable them thereto God works in them "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12, 13). Grace does not annul our responsibility but fits us to discharge it—it relieves from no duties—but equips for the performance of them.—A.W.P.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

IV. Its Dreadfulness.

If God is not slack in fulfilling His promises, equally certain is it that He will not be so in executing His threats. He has told us plainly in His Word how He regards sin and has faithfully warned us that He will by no means clear the guilty—that the penalty which He has pronounced shall surely be inflicted upon them. Sin, says the Lord, is that “abdominal thing that I hate” (Jer. 44:4) and the reality and intensity of His hatred will be evidenced by the vengeance which He visits upon it. Dreadful beyond words, beyond our power to conceive, beyond the bounds of human imagination will be the doom of the damned, even the “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). Impossible is it for us to exaggerate the frightfulness of those torments which are prepared for the lost: the most blood-curdling descriptions which poets and artists have furnished of the same fall very short of the dreadful reality itself.

“Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear so is Thy wrath” (Psa. 90:11). It will be seen from the title of this Psalm that *Moses* was the instrument selected by the Holy Spirit for the writing of it, and his eminent suitability and fitness for this particular task appears in many of its details. Again and again he expresses therein that which comported with his own experiences and observations. Notably is that the case with the verse before us: Moses *had witnessed* the outpourings of God’s anger and the irresistible power thereof as none belonging to any other generation (save Noah’s) before or since has beheld. He had seen the horrible plagues upon Egypt, culminating with the death of all her firstborn. He had been a spectator of the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea. He had been present when “there went out fire from the LORD and devoured” Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1, 2) because they had used strange fire in the tabernacle. Awe-inspiring demonstrations were those of the wrath of a holy God burning against them who scorned His authority and insulted His majesty.

Well, then, might Moses exclaim, “Who knoweth the power of Thine anger?”! Had he not also been present when “the ground clave asunder” that was under the feet of Korah, Dathan and Abiram so that “the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods: they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the Pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation” (Num. 16:31-33)? He had witnessed the awful doom which overtook the unbelieving Hebrews when the Lord “swore in His wrath” that they should not enter Canaan, “whose carcasses fell in the wilderness” (Heb. 3:11-18). What terrifying exhibitions were these of the Divine displeasure! How impotent is the creature when the Most High rises up to smite him—less capable is he then of defending himself than is a worm to resist the tread of an elephant.

“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire and the rocks are thrown down by Him” (Nahum 1:2, 6). When the Almighty shall come forth to execute vengeance upon His enemies, the whole Creation will tremble and so intense will be the fire of His wrath that this world and all that is therein shall be burnt up and its very elements “melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10). Then will be exposed those perversions and misrepresentations of the Divine char-

acter which men had fondly framed as a sop to their conscience and a salve to their fears. Then shall be swept away their refuges of lies that God is too gentle and merciful to ever make good His threats. No confederacy of His foes shall be successful in withstanding the storm of His fury—though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished. There will be no avenue of escape available—His goodness had been abused, His mercy refused, so that His wrath must then be endured.

The fearfulness of the punishment awaiting the wicked was adumbrated in the unspeakable sufferings of the Saviour. Divine justice dealt with Christ as the Substitute of His guilty people and there was meted out to Him the penalty which was due them. Had Christ been nothing but a mere creature the awful punishment visited upon Him had utterly crushed Him, but because God had “laid help upon One that is mighty” He was able to “endure the whole of wrath Divine.” Being God and Man in one Person, the Lord Jesus was capable of enduring infinite suffering—to endure compressed into a brief season that which shall be spread out through *all eternity* upon the wicked. How terrible the suffering which the Redeemer experienced is intimated in both Old and New Testament alike, where His inward anguish and His outward afflictions are made known to us. It is by solemnly and reverently pondering *them* that we are enabled to form some faint conception of the intolerable wrath which God pays out to sin.

Concerning the Redeemer’s passion we read of “the travail His soul” (Isa. 53:11)—that which His body received at the hands of men was nothing in comparison with what He experienced *within* from the hand of God. His inward anguish was evidenced when the full cup of God’s wrath was put into His hands. “Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say?” (John 12:27). He was put to such a strait that, considered as Man, He was in a manner nonplussed, at a loss for words. The horror of what lay immediately before Him was so great that He could not give expression to it. As our blessed Lord approached the Cross the horizon darkened for Him more and more. From earliest infancy He had suffered at the hands of man. From the beginning of His public ministry He had suffered at the hands of Satan: but at the Cross He was to suffer death at the hands of *God*. Jehovah Himself was to bruise Him and put Him to grief, and it was *this* which now overshadowed everything else.

In Gethsemane Christ entered the awful gloom of the three hours of darkness at Calvary. There we hear the Holy One saying, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . . O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:38, 39). He views the black clouds arising, He sees the fearful storm about to burst upon Him, He premeditates the unspeakable horror of being abandoned by God. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful”: the Greek signifies He was begirt with sorrow, that He was immersed in the anticipated wrath of Heaven. All the faculties and powers of His soul were wrung with anguish. Mark employs another form of expression, “He began to be sore amazed” (14:33)—a remarkable expression *that* to describe the God-man!—the Greek term denotes the greatest extremity of amazement, such as makes one’s hair to stand on end and flesh to creep. Mark adds, “and to be very heavy,” which intimates an utter sinking of spirit. His heart was melted like wax at the sight of the awful cup. Luke tells us that He was “in an agony” the Greek word meaning to be engaged in a combat, for His holy soul shrank from encountering the undiluted wrath of a sin-hating God.

So intense was the Saviour's agony, that cold as was the night, His sweat was "as it were great drops of blood pouring down to the ground" (Luke 22:44), yet no hand of man was smiting Him! And here we perceive the fitness of the place chosen for the scene of Christ's terrible but preliminary suffering, for "Gethsemane" means "the olive press"—the olive press being where the life blood of the olives was pressed out drop by drop. It was indeed a fit footstool to the Cross, a footstool of an agony unutterable and unparalleled. On the cross Christ actually drained the cup which was presented to Him in Gethsemane—producing that terrible cry—"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" There it is we behold what a horrible thing sin is, what a terrible thing God's wrath is, and what madness it is to contend with Him who will by no means clear the guilty. The death of Christ was "the wages of sin" and that death was a violent and cursed one which had extreme anguish of soul and body going before and along with it. Said Christ, "For if they do these things in a green tree what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31). If God inflicted such sufferings upon the Holy One, what must be the portion of those who are full of sin, fit fuel for the flame!

Consider now the awful sentence itself: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Mark the Judge: this is none other than *Christ*, for "God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). It is an error to suppose there is a greater austerity in the Father than there is in the Son toward sinners, imagining that the latter is easier to deal with than the former. So it is equally wrong to conclude the Son is more tolerant toward sin than is the Father, that He is more willing to acquit the guilty. The self-same One who cleansed the temple of its traffickers and who pronounced such awful denunciations upon the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23) shall in the Day of Judgment utter this irrevocable doom upon the wicked. Then shall they learn how terrible is "the wrath of the Lamb."

"Depart," says He to them. "Depart from Me," the alone Saviour, the One you scorned, whose easy yoke you refused. "Depart from Me": get out of My sight; I never wish to behold you again. "Ye cursed": O what a malediction! You have cursed others and now you are cursed yourselves—cursed in your bodies and cursed in your souls. You are cursed of God, cursed of angels, cursed of the saints, and henceforth you shall curse yourselves for your folly and madness. All your curses shall now recoil upon your own heads. "Into everlasting fire": the most fearful and tormenting of the elements. "Into everlasting fire" which because of its intensity is termed "a furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:42), even "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8). The stench of the brimstone rendering it the more intolerable. It is "unquenchable fire" for the wrath of God is inextinguishable, and "everlasting fire" for an eternal God shall preserve eternally all who are cast into it.

No ordinary fire is this, any more than that which burned in the bush which consumed not (Exo. 3:2). It is a "prepared" fire, prepared by God. It is prepared "for the devil and his angels," that is, for God's arch-enemy and his fellows. Yet it is a fire which torments the body, evoking "wailing and gnashing of teeth." Nevertheless it is different from any fire now known unto man, for this infernal fire has no light or brightness attending it and those cast into it experience "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13). It is a fire which shall everlastingly burn and yet consume not its victims. As the bodies of the wicked as well as the bodies of the righteous are to be raised by God, so a miracle of Di-

vine power shall be wrought upon the one as truly as upon the other. As the latter are vessels of mercy “prepared unto glory” (both their souls and bodies fitted for Heaven), so the former are “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom. 9:22)—having both *souls* and *bodies* capacitated for enduring the everlasting fire.

“And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment” (Matt. 25:46). The Greek word which is here rendered “punishment” is rightly translated “torment” in 1 John 4:18 (“fear hath torment”), which affords clear proof that so far from the wicked being annihilated or in a condition of insensibility they consciously suffer excruciating anguish. So also the words “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7): note the present tense of the verb—only one who is conscious is capable of “suffering.” How dreadful that torment is may be gathered from other passages, as in “tormented day and night, forever” (Rev. 20:10). The same word is found again in “their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he striketh a man” (Rev. 9:5)—the virulent poison of which produces horrible agony. In Revelation 12:2 it is employed to express the travail pangs of a woman “pained to be delivered.” In Matthew 14:24 it is used to describe the experience of a ship in an angry sea, “tossed with waves.” Said the demons to Christ, “Art Thou come to torment us before the time” (Matt. 8:29).

In addition to the agony entailed by physical suffering there will be unbearable mental anguish, for all the faculties of the soul will be preserved in the lost. The understanding, which had been atrophied by unbelief, shall then fully understand the sinfulness of sin and the madness of fighting against the Most High. The conscience, whose voice was so often silenced by the clamourings of pleasure, shall then perform its functions and be fully alive to the wrath of God. But most awful of all will be the workings of memory. O what repining, what remorse, what self-condemnation shall fill the hearts of the damned as they recollect opportunities wasted, privileges abused, warnings spurned, entreaties despised! Then shall they recall those faithful sermons to which they turned a deaf ear and the offers of mercy they refused. Here they took no time to seriously consider the welfare of their souls and preparations for the hereafter but in Hell they shall have time enough, for there will be no other employments to hinder. When it is too late they will have no other work than to reflect and consider.

V. Its Duration.

We shall not attempt to enter upon a critical discussion of the Hebrew and Greek words which the translators of the King James Version rendered “eternal,” “everlasting,” and “forever and ever.” In the first place, we believe its translators were endowed with quite as much honesty and scholarship as any who have followed them, so that it would be both trivial and arrogant to challenge their renditions. In the second place, we are fully assured that the Providence of God so superintended the preparation of that particular version which was to prevail in the English-speaking world for three centuries, that its translators were graciously preserved from any serious errors. In the third place, any critical inquiry of the Hebrew and Greek terms is quite needless: the plain and unlettered man can verify for himself the accuracy of our English equivalents from collateral considerations which render him independent of the schools. When he reads, “these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46), he has no difficulty in perceiving that the suffering of the lost is as endless as the bliss of the saved.

Among the reasons which forbid us to believe that the wicked will ever be released from punishment and restored to the Divine favour are the following. First, *the nature of sin*. Sin and guilt are inseparably connected and therefore sin deserves punishment: if, then, guilt cannot be eradicated, the punishment must be interminable. Before the punishment could end the guilt must cease to exist and before a lost sinner can be guiltless his criminal actions must become innocent ones. But can vice become virtue even though a million years should pass over it? Vice and virtue, sin and holiness are founded in the very nature of things and therefore must forever remain immutable so that what once deserved punishment will forever deserve punishment. As then the nature of sin cannot be changed nor its guilt obliterated, therefore the punishment of the damned must of necessity be eternal.

Second, *the character of the damned*. That their character is irremediably and irrevocably fixed is clear from many considerations. Their resurrection is termed “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29) which expressly excludes all hope of their regeneration in the next life. The fact that their Judge shall say unto them, “Depart from Me ye *cursed*” intimates plainly there is no possibility of their reclamation. As we have pointed out in an earlier article God’s aim in their punishment is not their personal benefit but the taking of satisfaction unto His vindictory justice. It is not to save but to destroy them that they are cast into the Lake of Fire. It is not to express His tender mercy but to manifest His indignation and wrath that the torments of Hell are designed. God’s end in chastising the righteous in this life and punishing the wicked in the next are diametrically opposite. Punishment has never softened the unregenerate. The plagues sent upon Pharaoh only served to harden his heart and the six thousand years of punishment which Satan has already experienced has not rendered him any less the inveterate enemy of God. The punishment of the damned will but confirm their malignant disposition. Therefore it is written in the very last chapter of God’s Word, “he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev. 22:11): as the tree falls, so will it forever lie.

Third, *the Atonement*. In previous sections we have appealed to the sufferings which Christ endured at the hand of God when He received the requital which was due the sins of His people—as proof of the nature of the punishment awaiting the wicked—that it is *penal* in its character and not disciplinary or reformatory. We have also directed attention to Christ’s sufferings as illustrative of the intolerable portion awaiting the lost: if the anticipation of bearing God’s wrath caused the Saviour such horror and anguish, moving Him to make supplication “with strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7) and making Him to sweat great drops of blood, how much more will feeble creatures sink down and be utterly overwhelmed by God’s vengeance? We revert once more to the Cross as indicating the *duration* of the punishment awaiting the damned. If the Sacrifice needed by the Church must be one of *infinite* worth, could her guilt be only of *limited* proportions? That sin for which none but an eternal Person could make expiation must have penal consequences of unlimited continuance. And since there “remaineth no more (further) sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26)—when the Sacrifice of Christ has been spurned, then the doom of the lost is irremediable.

Fourth, *the never-dying worm*. In the space of six verses (Mark 9:43-48), during a single discourse, the Lord Jesus referred no less than five times to 1. “the fire that never shall be quenched” and three times to “where their worm dieth not,” and never was He guilty of idle repetition. When a man dies and his body putrefies it breeds worms which

prey upon his carcass—a fearful adumbration of that which shall afflict the souls of those suffering “the Second Death.” That never-dying worm typifies the reflections of memory and the reproaches of conscience tormented by the wrath of God which will forever gnaw at the soul. This is “the sting of death” (1 Cor. 15:56) which “at the last biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder” (Prov. 23:32): unpardoned sin being the venom of death’s dart. This expression at once gives the lie to the theories of annihilation and future restitution to happiness, for on either of these suppositions their worm *would* die. Christ affirms “their worm *dieth* not”—forever and ever finding that to prey upon in the lost. Consequently, we read, “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever” (Rev. 14:11) without cessation or termination.—A.W.P.

