

Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 2
FEBRUARY, 1940
UNWORTHINESS

It is impossible for the creature to do anything which merits anything at the hands of God, for even if he should fully perform his duty he is still an “unprofitable servant” (Luke 17:10). Doubly so is this the case with a fallen creature, for his entire record is one of demerit. He is an undischarged bankrupt, and has nothing with which to pay his just debts. Clemency from his Creditor is his only hope. It is at this very point that Divine grace meets his deep need, for grace is favour shown to the undeserving and ill-deserving. The grace of God abounds even unto the holy angels, but it superabounds toward the depraved descendants of Adam. It lay not within the power of the original denizens of Heaven to do anything which entitled them to such high honours: it was grace pure and simple that made them the attendants of the King of kings. But to take on High those who have groveled in the miry clay of earth is favour shown to those who have earned the wages of eternal death.

Now when Divine grace bestows salvation upon the ill-deserving, it makes them conscious of the infinite favour that has been shown them. Fallen man is naturally proud, complacent, and self-righteous. He credits to himself good marks to which he is not entitled, and those against him he denies or seeks to explain away. He prates of his religious performances (Luke 18), and considers himself entitled to even more than that which he receives from God (Matt. 20:10, 11). But wherever the miracle of regenerating grace is wrought, all this is reversed. Its subject is stripped of his peacock feathers, made poor in spirit, and humbled into the dust before God. He is made painfully aware of the loathsome plague of his heart, given a sight of his vileness in the light of God’s holiness, and brought to realize that he is a spiritual pauper, dependent upon Divine charity. He now readily acknowledges that he is a Hell-deserving sinner.

“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant” (Gen. 32:10). This is something more than the language of a particular individual who lived in the remote past: it is the confession made by all who are the recipients of the saving grace of God. Jacob was, in the leading features of his history, a representative character. Before he had done any good or evil, while yet in his mother’s womb, it was revealed that he was the elect and beloved of God (Rom. 9:10-13). Yet the course followed by him in early life made it apparent that he was, “by nature a child of wrath even as others.” The distinguishing favour of God was shown to him at Bethel, where a fugitive from justice, alone, asleep on the bare ground, the Lord appeared to him. Severe trials then followed, but it was not until he was “greatly afraid and distressed” (Gen. 32:7) that he took his proper place before the Lord. How blessed it is to be assured that “the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psa. 46:7). The “God of Jacob” is the God of all who feel and acknowledge their utter unworthiness and their complete dependency on sovereign grace.

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am *not worthy* to bear” (Matt. 3:11). If Jacob is to be regarded as a representative believer (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob portraying the three sides of his character), then John the Baptist is surely to be looked upon as the prototype of the officers in Christ’s kingdom. One of the outstanding and identifying marks which distinguish His true under-shepherds from the false is their deep and genuine humility. The

public representatives of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart” are themselves characterized by diffidence and modesty. They marvel at the honour bestowed upon them and own their utter undeservedness and unfitness for such a high calling. Thus it was with the man whom Divine grace called to be our Lord’s forerunner. So far from being puffed up by the dignified position he held, he did not feel meet to unloose his Master’s shoes. Though the greatest of them born of women (Matt. 11:11), his motto was, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

“The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am *not worthy* that Thou shouldest come under my roof” (Matt. 8:8). Here again we perceive the same leading effect which is produced in all of its subjects by the miracle of saving grace: pride is subdued, self is effaced, a sense of ill-desert takes possession of the heart. In this instance we behold one who belonged to that hard and haughty race, the Romans. He was a man of rank, an officer in Caesar’s army, accustomed to issuing orders to those under his authority. Beautiful is it to see the lion transformed into a lamb. He had appealed to the great Physician on behalf of a servant lying sick of the palsy. The blessed Saviour at once declared, “I will come and heal him; whereupon he replied, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (v. 8). The sequel is instructive, “When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (v. 10): one of the elements of great faith is deep humility.

“For I am the least of the Apostles, *that am not worthy* (Greek) to be called an Apostle” (1 Cor. 15:9). “Least” not in the sight of God nor as venerated by the Church, but “least” in his own estimation; as he wrote in another place, “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). It was not that he was lacking in qualifications or gifts, but that he had such a sense of his pre-conversion sins. How meanly he thought of himself! He felt that he was unfit to fight under the banner of Christ, still less to be His chief lieutenant. What complete self-abasement! “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10): the position he held, the authority he possessed, the success which attended his labours, were all freely ascribed to Divine favour. Here is proof of what we said in our opening paragraph: where the saving grace of God operates, it produces a sense of ill-desert. The most eminent Christians are always the most lowly ones; those honoured in Christ’s service are deeply conscious of their unprofitableness.

“*Worthy is the LAMB*” (Rev. 5:12). This brief article would be incomplete did we fail to bring out the grand design of the Divine favour. The operations of God’s grace are intended not only to abase its subjects but to exalt the Saviour. If those blessed workings produce in us a deep sense of our utter unworthiness, they also result in a profound conviction of the immeasurable worthiness of Christ. Beautifully is this portrayed in Revelation 5. Waiving the question as to exactly what is signified by the sealed book in the right hand of the Throne-Sitter, attention is focussed upon the fact that none in Heaven or earth was worthy to open the same. This provides the background for the central figure: “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book” (v. 5). Infinite merits are possessed by Him, and all the inhabitants of Heaven, angelic and human, unite in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth’s sake” (Psa. 115:1).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

13. *The Law and Retaliation: Matthew 5:38-42.*

That section of our Lord's Sermon which we are now considering has been misunderstood and wrested by not a few fanatics attributing to it a meaning which is flatly contradicted by other passages. For this reason we deemed it necessary to enter into a detailed examination of its terms. Two articles have already been devoted thereto, but as these appeared in the 1939 volume, it is requisite for us to present a brief summary of the ground therein covered, that new readers may the better grasp what we now write. First, it has been shown that Christ is not here repealing a Mosaic statute and substituting in its place a more merciful and spiritual rule, but that He was engaged (as in the previous sections of this Sermon) in refuting a serious error of the Scribes and Pharisees and in pressing the high requirements of the Law.

The words, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (v. 38), occur three times in the Pentateuch. They enunciated one of the judicial laws which the Lord gave to Israel. That law was prescribed solely for the guidance and use of *magistrates*. Its design was three-fold: to protect the weak against the strong, to serve as a salutary warning unto evil-doers, and to prevent the judge from inflicting too severe a punishment upon those guilty of maiming others. As such it was a just, merciful and beneficial law. If the principle of this statute—the infliction of corporal punishment on those convicted of crimes of violence—was universally and strictly enforced today, it would make this world a much safer place to live. But this law had been greatly perverted by the Jewish leaders—for instead of confining it to the *magistrates*, they had made a general application of it, teaching that it gave to *each person* the right to privately avenge his wrongs; and thereby they fostered the spirit of malice and condoned deeds of violence.

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (v. 39). This means that we are forbidden to take the law into our own hands, and pay back an adversary as he has done to us: nobler principles and spiritual considerations are to actuate us. Nor is this precept in anywise peculiar to the New Testament. Such passages as Proverbs 20:22, 24:29, 25:21, 22 expressly prohibit the taking of private vengeance. Our Lord, then, was continuing to press the high requirements of the moral law. It is to be duly noted, however, that neither the Law nor the Gospel require from us an unqualified and universal non-resistance to evil. There are times when an ignoring of wrongs done to us or of injuries inflicted upon us would obviously be a failure to perform our duty. We must never connive at the guilty escaping from justice nor in the slighting of it. Righteousness is to mark us in all our ways.

Graciousness and lawlessness are widely different things. Though gladly willing to forego our own rights, we must not neglect the rights of others, by turning loose on society those who would imperil its security. When a brother trespasses against us he must be challenged and not winked at: if he is unreasonable and impenitent, the matter must be brought before the church: should he still prove to be defiant and rebellious, then he is to be punished by being disfellowshipped (Matt. 18:15-17). Christ Himself resisted evil in the temple, when He found His Father's House had been turned into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves (John 2:13-17). The office of the magistrate is a Divine ordinance, and we are morally bound to support and co-operate with it. Notwithstanding, we must never appeal to the law in a spirit of malice and revenge, but rather because God has appointed and the good of society requires it.

But on the other hand, exceptions do not nullify a rule, rather do they serve to prove it. In turning from the strict letter of the precept, we must beware of losing its spirit. The disciple of Christ, the Prince of Peace, is to be a man of peace, meekly enduring wrong, patiently suffering loss, accepting hardships graciously. Not only are we to refrain from the act of retaliation, but even the desire itself must not be allowed, for God requires holiness of heart as well as of life. All malice and bitterness, wrath and clamour, evil speaking and unkind gestures, are to be put off—and bowels of mercy, compassion, and long-suffering put on—anything less is a falling short of the Christian standard. Not only are we to refrain from returning evil for evil, but we must return *good* for evil, blessing those who curse us and praying for those who despitely use us.

In what immediately followed, Christ amplified His, “Resist not evil,” by three examples wherein He shows how men are to behave themselves when they are wronged. First, “But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:39). Under these words are expressed all injuries done to men’s *bodies*, not only by words and blows, but also in the contempt of their persons, which is intimated by the reference to the “right cheek.” Usually men strike with the right hand and the blow falls on the left cheek, so that if the right cheek be smitten it is commonly with the back of the hand—a blow of contempt, which is even more provoking of retaliation than one given in anger. Nevertheless, says Christ, even such a blow must not be returned, for the taking of private revenge is strictly prohibited. Let the old saying be remembered: it takes two to make a quarrel—though the aggressor be guilty of provocation, yet it is the *second* party who gives consent to a quarrel if he hits back.

“But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” There has been some controversy in certain quarters as to whether or not these words are to be understood literally. The question may be answered more readily by asking, Are they to be regarded absolutely or comparatively? Obviously, it must be the latter. First, were we to turn the other cheek to the smiter we should be tempting him unto sin, by inviting him to repeat the offense, which is manifestly wrong. Second, the example of Christ Himself refutes such an interpretation, for when He was smitten upon the cheek He did not turn the other unto the smiter. Third, the second half of this verse must not be detached from the first. Resist not evil: no matter how provoking be the occasion: revenge not thyself, but rather, “give place unto wrath” (Rom. 12:19). Rather than be guilty of malice and violence, be willing to submit meekly to further insults.

Our Lord certainly did not mean by these words, “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,” that we should court further wrongs, nor that in all cases we must meekly submit to such without any kind of resistance. When He was smitten before the high priest, He did not return blow for blow, but He did remonstrate against it. In so doing Christ was not actuated by a spirit of retaliation but of justice to His own character, and what He said had a tendency to convict the offender and the assembly. This precept is expressed in the strongest possible form to teach us that we must not render evil for evil, but rather suffer wrong, and submit to a repetition of an injury rather than go about to avenge ourselves. It is the *principle* rather than the act which is inculcated. Yet in certain circumstances a literal compliance would be right, which instead of disgracing us, would raise us in the esteem of the godly.

Christ here condemned the common practice of fighting and quarreling. Even though sorely provoked by another, He will not allow us to strike back. There is nothing to inti-

mate that He disallowed the Apostles from carrying swords for self-defense, but as soon as Peter drew his to resist the officers that came to apprehend Him in the garden, He bade him sheathe it again. In like manner, this precept reprehends the challenging unto a duel, and also the acceptance of such: better be dubbed a coward by our fellow than disobey and displease the Lord. If it be said that it is a disgrace to show the white feather, the reply is that it is true grace to abstain from sinning. Mark it well that a slap in the face is a vastly different thing from life itself being endangered: where that is the case, flight or calling for the help of the law is our duty; yet we must seek to defend ourselves rather than be killed.

“And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also” (Matt. 5:40). The first example cited by Christ concerned insults to our persons, this one has to do with wrongful attacks upon our possessions. It sets forth another characteristic of evil men, namely, to prey upon the goods of their fellows, either privately or under cover of law. Such an one was Zacchaeus before his conversion, for he had enriched himself by “false” or fraudulent methods (Luke 19:8). But understand that all who resort to what are called “tricks of the trade,” all who trade upon the ignorance of their fellows by means of “shady” devices, all who are successful in the courts as the result of employing tricky lawyers, are—no matter what be their reputation for shrewdness in the world—in the sight of God, *evil* men; and therefore the Christian must have no fellowship with such.

It is to be duly noted that this second example respects one of a *trifling character*. As the former concerned not the severance of a limb by the sword, but only a slap in the face, so this relates not to the seizure of our property but merely the loss of a garment. Unless this be duly noted, we are likely to miss the force of our Lord’s exhortation and make an entirely unwarrantable application. That which Christ here condemned was not the legitimate use of the courts, but the going to law over *mere trifles*. The doing so evidences a contentious spirit and a heart that is anxious for revenge, which ill-becomes a Christian, as the Apostle shows in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. It is all too common a practice among men in general, rather than enter into litigation over the loss of a coat—the costs entailed in such a procedure often being more than the purchasing of a new garment—far better to suffer the loss of it.

“In cases of great importance, other duties may require him to avail himself of the protection of the law: justice to his creditors, and to the public, and even to his family may require him to defend his estate and to give a check to the exorbitance of unreasonable men. A Christian may prosecute a criminal out of love of public justice, though not from private revenge. Yet there will generally be men of the world enough to deal with such predators; and a disciple of Christ will seldom have occasion to waste his time or lose his temper about them” (Thomas Scott). Thus, on the one hand we must guard against anything which would encourage evil in the wicked; and on the other, conduct ourselves as those whose affections are set upon things above. Divine wisdom and grace are necessary if we are to properly preserve the balance here.

The ruling of our own spirit is far more important than the clothes which we wear. The preservation of inward tranquility is of greater price than a coat or a cloak. Here our Lord teaches us to set lightly by our temporal goods, that our time and strength may be devoted to the concerns of Eternity. Nothing more surely unfits us for the pursuit of holiness than a heart which is resentful at and contentious with others. Angry passions and

the workings of a spirit of revenge disqualify us for the worship of God. Meekness and lowliness of heart are the graces which we particularly need to learn of Christ. Though there may be cases where duty requires us to take legal action against one who defrauds us, yet this must be our last resort, for it is extremely difficult to handle tar without the fouling of our garments.

“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain” (Matt. 5:41). The actual reference is to public transport service. The Roman troops had power to requisition able-bodied men. Marching through a district, they could compel men to act as porters or guides within a certain area or limit: an illustration of which we have in the case of Simon of Cyrene being compelled to bear the Cross of Christ (Mark 15:21). Such service was not popular: often the demand was inconvenient as well as laborious, and was apt to be rendered in a reluctant and complaining spirit. Christ’s command is that even when service is constrained and unreasonable, it should never be performed in a sullen and slavish spirit: but cheerfully and in excess of the demand. Happily there remains but few occasions when we are impressed into the service of the State. But in every life there are circumstances that force unwelcome tasks; every man has duties which are undertaken not of choice but of necessity—they should be performed readily and cheerfully.

This third example cited by Christ, in which He forbids us to resist evil, has to do with the deprivation or curtailment of our personal *liberties*. It is a case where superiors are guilty of wrong-doing to their inferiors, wherein the injured one is prohibited from making resistance by way of private revenge. That which is inculcated is the abuse of authority and how the offended are to conduct themselves under the same—rather than give way unto bitter resentment, we must patiently bear the injustice, and even be ready to suffer the repetition thereof. The prohibition here made by Christ condemns all private reviling of the laws of the land, the railing of servants against what they deem to be unreasonable in their masters, and the refusal to pay our just dues.

In the example now before us we have noted a third kind of wickedness in evil men, namely, those in positions of power and authority wronging those who are under them, by infringing on their personal rights and unjustly curtailing their liberties. Those who are guilty of charging exorbitant rents, overworking their employees, robbing them of their Sabbath rest, and of grinding the faces of the poor, are—no matter what their rank, wealth and honour in the world—*evil men* in the sight of God, and as such they will meet with the due reward of their iniquities in the Day to come. It is for this reason, among others, that we are forbidden to resist or retaliate: in due time the Judge of all will right every wrong, and make it manifest to the whole universe that “the triumphing of the wicked is short.”

“In reference to personal liberty there can be no doubt that next to the blessings of a good conscience and the hope of eternal life, it is one of the most valuable privileges. Every Christian and every man should be ready to do much and suffer much, in order to secure it and retain it for himself and others. Yet at the same time, he will not only patiently submit to every necessary burden and constitutional restraint, but in obedience to our Lord’s precept he will bear much of the insolence of men—dressed up in a little brief authority—overlook many stretches of power, and endure even a variety of acts of oppression, rather than have recourse to violence and tumult” (J. Brown).

“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Matt. 5:42). This supplies a further illustration of that noble and generous spirit

which the righteousness of Christ's kingdom requires of its subjects. That righteousness will not only deter them from standing on every point of individual rights, but it will incline them to do good unto others. Interpreting this precept in the light of its setting, it sets forth the *positive* side of our duty: not only does Christ forbid men to requite evil for evil, but He commands them to return *good* for evil. It is better to give unto those who have no claims upon us, and to lend unto those who would impose upon kindness, than to cause strife by a selfish or surly refusal. Our possessions are to be held in stewardship for God and at the disposal of the real need of our fellows.

Unto those who object against the limitations we have placed upon the other precepts and the exceptions that have been pointed out, we would earnestly beg them to attend very closely to this one. Surely it is self-evident that the application of this particular injunction is *strictly qualified*. No one with any real acquaintance of the Scriptures can suppose that Christ here imposed an indiscriminate charity as a Christian duty: that we are to give or lend to everyone that asks. One of the growing curses of modern life is the ill-advised charity of those who allow their sympathies to run away with them. Lending is to be done "with discretion" (Psa. 112:5). The apostolic principle is, "That if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). It is no part of duty—either of the individual or of the State—to maintain in idleness those who are too lazy to work. If the following passage be carefully pondered, the will of God for us in this matter may be readily perceived: Proverbs 3:27; 1 Corinthians 16:2, 3; 2 Corinthians 8:13, 14; Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:17.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

2. *The Prophet Himself.*

Reviewing very briefly the ground covered in the previous article, we have seen, first, that the appearance on the scene of a Prophet of God is indicative of a season of declension and departure from God, his message being necessitated by the gross failure of those who have preceded him. Second, that his chief work is to arouse the slumbering public conscience, to rebuke evil-doers, to denounce iniquity, to call upon men to forsake their wickedness and return unto the Lord. Third, that his message is one which is unpalatable to the ungodly and empty professors of religion, for it deals with sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Fourth, that as he is no purveyor of pleasantries or tickler of ears, his mission is despised and his message rejected by the masses, and only an insignificant remnant respond to his call.

Now Elijah appeared on the stage of public action during one of the very darkest hours of Israel's sad history. He is introduced to us at the beginning of 1 Kings 17, and we have but to read through the previous chapters in order to discover what a deplorable state God's people were then in. Israel had grievously and flagrantly departed from Jehovah, and that which directly opposed Him had been publicly set up. Never before had the favoured Nation sunk so low. Fifty-eight years had passed since the kingdom had been rent in two following the death of Solomon. During that brief period no less than seven kings had reigned over the Ten Tribes, and all of them without exception were wicked men. Painful, indeed, is it to trace their sad course, and still more tragic to behold is how there has been a repetition of the same in the history of Christendom.

The first of those seven kings was Jeroboam. Concerning him we read that he, "made two calves of gold and said unto them, It is too much for you to go to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were *not* of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made" etc. (1 Kings 12:28-32). Let it be duty and carefully noted that the apostasy began with *the corrupting of the priesthood*, by installing into the Divine service men who were never called and equipped by God!

Of the next king, Nadab, it is said, "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 15:26). He was succeeded to the throne by the very man who murdered him, Baasha (1 Kings 15:27). Next came Elah, a drunkard, who in turn was a murderer (1 Kings 16:8, 9). His successor, Zimri, was guilty of "treason" (1 Kings 16:20). He was followed by a military adventurer of the name of Omri, and of him we are told "but Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities" (1 Kings 16:25, 26). The evil cycle was completed by Omri's son, for he was even more vile than those who had preceded him.

“And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him” (1 Kings 16:30, 31). This marriage of Ahab to a heathen princess was, as might fully be expected, (for we cannot trample God’s Law beneath our feet with impunity), fraught with the most frightful consequences. In a very short time all trace of the pure worship of Jehovah vanished from the land and gross idolatry became rampant. The golden calves were worshipped at Dan and Beersheba, a temple had been erected to Baal in Samaria, the “groves” of Baal appeared on every side, and the priests of Baal took full charge of the religious life of Israel.

It was openly declared that Baal lived and that Jehovah ceased to be. What a shocking state things had come to pass is clear from, “And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). Defiance of the Lord God and blatant wickedness had now reached its culminating point. This is made still further evident by, “in his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho” (v. 34). Awful effrontery was this, for of old it had been recorded “Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, cursed be the man before the LORD that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation in his firstborn” (Josh. 6:26). The rebuilding of the accursed Jericho was open defiance of God.

Now it was in the midst of this spiritual darkness and degradation there appeared on the stage of public action, with dramatic suddenness, a solitary but striking witness to and for the living God. An eminent commentator began his remarks upon 1 Kings 17 by saying, “the most illustrious Prophet Elijah was raised up in the reign of the most wicked of the kings of Israel.” That is a terse but accurate summing up of the situation in Israel at that time: not only so, but it supplies the key to all that follows. It is truly saddening to contemplate the awful conditions which then prevailed. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of Divine testimony was hushed. Spiritual death was spread over everything, and it looked as though Satan had indeed obtained complete mastery of the situation.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). God, with a high hand, now raised up a powerful witness for Himself. Elijah is here brought to our notice in a most abrupt manner. Nothing is recorded of his parentage or previous manner of life. We do not even know to which tribe he belonged, though from the fact that he was “of the inhabitants of Gilead” makes it likely that he pertained either to Gad or Manasseh, for Gilead was divided between them. “Gilead lay east of the Jordan: it was wild and rugged; its hills were covered with shaggy forests; its awful solitude was only broken by the dash of mountain streams; its valleys were the haunt of fierce wild beasts” (F.B.M.).

As we have pointed out above, Elijah is introduced to us in the Divine narrative in a very strange manner, without anything being told us of his ancestry or early life. We believe there is a *typical reason* why the Spirit made no reference to Elijah’s origin. Like Melchizedek, the beginning and end of his history is shrouded in sacred mystery. As the absence of any mention of Melchizedek’s birth and death was Divinely designed to foreshadow the eternal Priesthood and Kingship of Christ, so the fact that we know nothing of Elijah’s father and mother, and the further fact that he was supernaturally translated

from this world without passing through the portals of death, mark him as the typical forerunner of the everlasting Prophet. Thus the omission of such details adumbrated the *endlessness* of Christ's *prophetic* office.

The fact we are told that Elijah "was of the inhabitants of Gilead" is no doubt recorded as a sidelight upon his natural training—one which ever exerts a powerful influence on the forming of character. The people of those hills reflected the nature of their environment: they were rough and rugged, solemn and stern, dwelling in rude villages and subsisting by keeping flocks of sheep. Hardened by an open-air life, dressed in a cloak of camel's hair, accustomed to spending most of his time in solitude, possessed of sinewy strength which enabled him to endure great physical strain, he would present a marked contrast from the town dwellers in the lowland valleys, and more especially would he be distinguished from the pampered courtiers of the palace.

How young he was when the Lord first granted Elijah a personal and saving revelation of Himself we have no means of knowing, as we have no information upon his early religious training. But there is one sentence in a later chapter which enables us to form a definite idea of the spiritual calibre of the man—"I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts" (1 Kings 19:10). Those words cannot mean less than that he had God's glory greatly at heart and that the honour of His name meant more to him than anything else. Consequently, he must have been deeply grieved and filled with holy indignation as he became more and more informed about the terrible character and wide extent of Israel's defection from Jehovah.

There can be little room for doubt that Elijah must have been thoroughly familiar with the Scriptures, especially the first books of the Old Testament. Knowing how much the Lord had done for Israel, the signal favours He had bestowed upon them, he must have yearned with deep desire that they should please and glorify Him. But when he learned that this was utterly lacking, and as tidings reached him of what was happening on the other side of the Jordan—as he became informed of how Jezebel had thrown down God's altars, slain His servants, and replaced them with the idolatrous priests of heathendom—his soul must have been filled with horror and his blood made to boil with indignation, for he was, "very jealous for the LORD God of hosts." Would that more of such righteous indignation filled and fired us today.

Probably the question which now most deeply exercised, Elijah was, How should he act? What could he, a rude, uncultured, child of the desert, do? The more he pondered it, the more difficult the situation must have seemed. And no doubt Satan whispered in his ear, You can do *nothing*, conditions are hopeless. But there *was* one thing he could do: betake himself to that grand resource of all deeply tried souls—he could PRAY. And he did: as James 5:17 tells us, "he prayed earnestly." He prayed because he was assured that the Lord God lived and ruled over all. He prayed because he realized that God is all-mighty and that with Him all things are possible. He prayed because he felt his own weakness and insufficiency and therefore turned to One who is clothed with might and is infinitely self-sufficient.

But in order to be effectual, prayer must be grounded on the Word of God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him, and "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Now there was one particular passage in the earlier books of Scripture which seems to have been specially fixed on Elijah's attention: "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods, and

worship them; and then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, that *there be no rain*, and that the land yield not her fruit" (Deut. 11:16, 17). That was the very crime of which Israel was now guilty: they had turned aside to worship false gods. Suppose, then, that this Divinely threatened judgment should not be executed, would it not indeed appear that Jehovah was but a myth, a dead tradition? And Elijah was "very jealous for the LORD God of hosts," and accordingly we are told that "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain" (James 5:17). Thus we learn once more what true prayer is: it is faith laying hold of the Word of God, pleading it before Him, and saying, "Do as Thou hast said" (2 Sam. 7:25).

"He prayed earnestly that it might not rain." Do some of our readers exclaim, What a terrible prayer! Then we ask, was it not far more terrible that the favoured descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should despise and turn away from the Lord God and blatantly insult Him by worshipping Baal? Would you desire the thrice Holy One to wink at such enormities? Are His righteous laws to be trampled upon with impunity? Shall He refuse to enforce their just penalties? What conception would men form of the Divine character if He ignored their open defiance of Himself? Let Scripture answer: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Yes, and not only so, but as God declared, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether *as thyself*. I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psa. 50:21).

Ah, my reader, there is something far more dreadful than physical calamity and suffering, namely, moral delinquency and spiritual apostasy. Alas, that this is so rarely perceived today! What are crimes against man in comparison with high-handed sins against God? Likewise what are national reverses in comparison with the loss of God's favour? The fact is that Elijah had a true sense of values: he was "very jealous for the LORD God of hosts," and therefore he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. Desperate diseases call for drastic measures. And as he prayed Elijah obtained assurance that his petition was granted, and that he must go and acquaint Ahab. Whatever danger the Prophet might personally incur, both king and his subjects should learn the direct connection between the terrible drought and their sins which had occasioned it.

The task which now confronted Elijah was no ordinary one, and it called for more than common courage. For an untutored rustic of the hills to appear uninvited before a king who defied Heaven was sufficient to quell the bravest—the more so when his heathen consort shrank not from slaying any who opposed his will, in fact who had already put many of God's servants to death. What likelihood, then, was there of this lonely Gileadite escaping with his life? "But the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1): they who are right with God are neither daunted by difficulties nor dismayed by dangers. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (Psa. 3:6); "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" (Psa. 27:3): such is the blessed serenity of those whose conscience is void of offense and whose trust is in the living God.

The hour for the execution of his stem task had arrived, and Elijah leaves his home in Gilead to deliver unto Ahab his message of judgment. Picture him on his long and lonely journey. What were the subjects which engaged his mind? Would he be reminded of the similar mission on which Moses had embarked, when he was sent by the Lord to deliver

his ultimatum to the haughty monarch of Egypt? Well, the message which he bore would be no more palatable to the degenerate king of Israel. Yet such a recollection need in no wise deter or intimidate him: rather should the remembrance of the sequel strengthen his faith. The Lord God had not failed his servant Moses, but had stretched forth His mighty arm on his behalf, and in the end had given him full success. The wondrous works of God in the past should ever hearten His servants and saints in the present.—A.W.P.

THE HOLY SABBATH

8. *Its Observance.*

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words” (Isa. 58:13). We quote this passage again because it sums up what we have sought to bring before the reader in our last two articles. First, it expresses the grand truth that the Sabbath is not to be looked upon as an irksome duty, but as a sacred privilege. Instead of being a burden grievous to be borne, it affords us a special opportunity for profitable and joyous exercises. The spirit in which we are to enter upon its hallowed employments is neither one of bondage nor dread, but of freedom and gladness. We are to find in it our greatest Joy of the week, delighting ourselves in the Lord, all that is within us praising His holy name.

The accompanying promises afford great encouragement for those whose sincere desire it is to honour the Lord in this ordinance: “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the *high places* of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (v. 14). Expressed in New Covenant terms, that means, first, such an observance of the Sabbath will afford us much more comfort in the Lord. “The more pleasure we take in serving God, the more pleasure we shall find in it. If we go about duty cheerfully, we shall go from it with satisfaction” (Matthew Henry). Second, we shall be given victory over our spiritual enemies: observe how the Lord’s causing Israel to triumph over the Egyptians is spoken of as, “He made him ride on the *high places* of the earth” (Deut. 32:13). Third, our souls shall be richly fed with the blessings of the covenant. The precious products of the anti-typical Canaan—fed with foretastes of it now.

Having fully established the two basic principles which are to regulate us in Sabbath observance, we must now point out something of the practical application of the same to the details of this duty. First, we will consider *the preparation* which should be made, for we cannot enter properly or profitably into the keeping of this holy rest without a fit approach thereto. It is noteworthy that this expression, “the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42) occurs not in the Old Testament but in the New, being found in substance in each of the four Gospels. This sacred institution is not to be approached lightly and carelessly, but with definite forethought and conscientious preparation of our secular affairs, our domestic arrangements, and especially of our hearts. We greatly fear that it is failure at this very point which is the reason why so many miss the richest benefits of this ordinance.

Before proceeding further we must carefully consider the question as to *when* this “preparation” is to begin, and this requires us to fix the time at which the Sabbath itself commences. In certain quarters this has been made a point of controversy, some contending that it begins at sunset of the preceding day and ends with sunset of its own, appealing to, “from even unto even shall ye celebrate your Sabbath” (Lev. 23:32). That this was one noteworthy feature of and obtained throughout the Mosaic economy is readily granted, but that the same is binding on us today we emphatically deny. In the first place, a day of rest, according to the rules of natural equity, ought to be proportioned unto a day of work, and that is reckoned both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as from morning to evening: Psalm 104:20-23; Matthew 20:1-8.

In the second place, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His resurrection gave beginning and being to the special Day of holy rest under the Gospel, came forth from the grave not until the morning of the first day of the week, when the light of the sun began to dispel the darkness of the night, or when it dawned towards the day, as it is variously expressed by the Evangelists. This should settle the matter for His people. Thus, the Christian Sabbath is again sharply distinguished from the Judaical Sabbath. Finally, it should be pointed out that in the description furnished of the first seven days of Genesis 1, that while it is said of each of the first six that it was constituted of an evening and a morning, yet of the seventh this is significantly omitted: it *is* simply called “the seventh day,” without any mention of the preceding evening. Thus the Mosaic was distinguished from the primitive Sabbath as well as from the Christian.

Our Sabbath, then, is to be regarded as extending from midnight of the seventh day (Saturday) till midnight of the first day. Thus the “preparation” for it would fall upon the Saturday, particularly the evening of that day. “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,” includes the taking of all necessary forethought which is required for the sanctifying thereof. It is a profanation of the Lord’s Day to make it one of feasting, and therefore its meals should be as plain and simple as possible, and all cooking done on Saturday (Exo. 16:23). The women who cared for our Lord’s body mixed the spices and ointments on the day preceding, considering it a servile work not suitable for the Sabbath (Luke 23:54, 56). Has not this been recorded for our learning?

The due preparation of our hearts and minds is especially needful. As we are to keep our foot when going to the house of God (Eccl. 5:1), that is, consider what we are about to do, to where we are going, and that which is due God in our solemn approaches unto Him; so we must not enter into the sacred exercises of His holy day without thought and prayer. “I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh Me” (Lev. 10:3) is the Lord’s unwavering requirement. He is greatly dishonoured when we carelessly rush into any of the appointed means of grace, and therefore does the Apostle exhort us, “Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). This means far more than grave countenances and bodily postures of veneration: let us have hearts and minds that are spiritualized.

Our first concern should be to see to it that our minds are freed from the worries of business and the cares of this life, so that they may without distraction be staved upon the Lord. Much converse with the world is very apt to beget a worldly frame of mind in us, and being so much absorbed with earthly things during the six working days taints the heart with worldliness. Though it be our duty in all our secular concerns to live unto God therein and do everything unto His glory, yet they exert such an influence upon us as to unfit us for spiritual exercises and heavenly contemplation. And therefore it devolves upon us to purge our minds of secular affairs, business concerns, and worldly cares, as far as in us lies, so that we may the better and more wholly rest in and delight ourselves with the Lord.

In endeavouring to bring our souls into a fit frame for the duties of the Lord’s Day, the evening before we should engage our thoughts with meditations suitable thereto. This is a fitting time to consider the lost Sabbaths of our unregenerate days, and which we have to account for or repent of. This is the time to review the week now nearly ended, and put right with God our sad failures therein. Then is the time to meditate upon the wondrous patience of God, which has so long borne with our waywardness and slackness, and who

notwithstanding has spared us to approach another Sabbath. This is the time to ponder the vanity of worldly things and how utterly contemptible they are when compared with communion with God. This is the time to give ourselves up to confession, to prayer, to praise.

As our eyes open upon the light of the Sabbath we should most earnestly pray that we may be preserved from trifling away its holy hours, and seriously should we ask ourselves how we may most profitably improve them. We ought to be very importunate with God that He will graciously banish from our minds everything which would distract and turn us away from Him, that He would so sanctify our hearts that from the beginning to the end of His day we may be entirely given up to those ends and exercises for which He has consecrated the Sabbath. We ought also to be equally importunate in praying that He will grant His ministers the assistance of the Holy Spirit in preparing a message which will glorify Him and edify His people. So, too, we should ask the Lord for the same spiritual mercies to be bestowed upon our fellow-saints as we have craved for ourselves. This will serve to prepare us to engage in family devotions, before we wait upon the public worship of the day.

Throughout the Sabbath we are to abstain from everything that would impede its spiritual observance. Under no circumstances must there be any buying or selling on that Day, or the encouraging of those who do so. Sunday newspapers and all secular literature is to be then strictly banned by us. The paying of social calls and the making of unnecessary visits whereby the worship of God in families is interrupted and worldly conversation is introduced are desecrations of the Sabbath. All unnecessary work in providing for our dining tables on that day is to be avoided: a cold meal with God's blessing is infinitely better than a hot one with His frown. Great watchfulness must be exercised against idle conversation. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29)—that holds good at all times, but doubly so on the Sabbath.

All needless taking of journeys on the Lord's Day are sinful. In this connection we would earnestly remind the reader of that exhortation of Christ's, "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath Day" (Matt. 24:20). This was plainly a prophetic warning against that species of Sabbath desecration which has, alas, become so rife. It is rendered the more striking inasmuch as it is the only warning He gave to His disciples against any particular kind of encroachment on the Day of Rest. And for what does He here teach them to pray? Not that they may be kept from travelling for pleasure or for purposes of commerce, but that in a time of calamity and danger events might be so ordered by God that they should not be obliged to preserve their lives and flee for safety by travelling on *that* day. How He wished to impress upon us the unique sanctity of the Sabbath!

Turning now to the positive side: the reading and pondering of the Scripture should have a prominent place in the occupations of this Day. In our strenuous age there are comparatively few who have many leisure hours through the week, and often they are too weary to use those they do have for serious study. But it is far otherwise on the Day of Rest: special opportunity is then afforded for seeking *spiritual* nourishment. At least one hour in the early morning, another in the afternoon, and one more before retiring, ought to be spent in the Word of God and devotional literature. As six days have been directed mainly to providing for the needs of the body, the seventh is to be improved by seeking

food for the soul: thereby is our strength renewed and we are fitted for the duties of the ensuing week.

In addition to seasons of private prayer and feeding on the Word, all our spare moments on the Lord's Day should be employed in spiritual meditations. Then is our golden opportunity for serious reflections and delightful contemplation: to turn our thoughts from things temporal to things spiritual, and to project our minds into that eternal state to which we are constantly approaching. We should meditate on God as Creator and delight ourselves afresh in all His wondrous works. We should consider how we lost our original rest in God by sin, and how He might justly have abandoned us to eternal restlessness. We should meditate upon the *recovery* of our rest in God by the great atonement of Christ and His triumphant emerging from the grave. This is indeed the principal duty of this day: to dwell upon and rejoice in this recovery of a rest in God and of a rest for God in us. This is the fruit of infinite wisdom, amazing grace, and incomprehensible love: then let us give glory to God and His Christ for the same. We are also to remember that the Sabbath is a pledge of our everlasting rest with God.

Let it also be observed that this Day affords the most favourable opportunity for *training children* in the fear and nurture of the Lord. Family instruction is one of the most important duties thereof. How many thousands owe their conversion, under God, to Sabbath catechising, Scripture reading, and religious instruction, and the simple but fervent prayers of a pious parent or relative! The heads of families should do all they can to promote the spiritual and eternal good of those under their care. No Christian parent should entrust the instructing of his children in the things of God to only Sunday School teachers, but ought to *personally* discharge much of this responsibility. Let portions of the Word be read together, simple explanations and practical applications be made: verses should be allotted for memorizing during the week, with a hearing of the same on the Sabbath. Such books as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the life of some Missionary, etc., may also be profitably read to the children.

This is also a season eminently suitable for works of *charity*. All possible doubt on this score has been removed by the specific teaching and personal example of Christ. He affirmed that it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath Day. It is both our privilege and duty, especially of those without family responsibilities, to seek after and minister unto those who are cut off from the public means of grace: to visit the sick and the aged, to read the Word to those who cannot read it for themselves, to engage in acts of mercy and compassion unto those needing our help. The more we endeavour to brighten the lot of others, the more will we enter into the joy of Him who ever went about doing good. It is always the self-centered who are the most discontented and miserable.

We heartily endorse the following observations from the Puritan, Owen. "There is no such certain standard or measure for the observance of the duties of this day, as that every one who exceeds it should by it be cut short, or that those who on important reasons come short of it should be stretched out thereunto. As God provided in His services of old that he who was not able to offer a bullock might offer a dove, with respect unto their outward condition in the world, so here there is an allowance also for the natural temperaments and abilities of men. Only whereas if persons of old had *pretended* poverty to save their charge in the procuring of an offering, it would not have been acceptable, yea, they would themselves have fallen under the curse of the deceiver; so no more now will a pretense of weakness or natural inability be an excuse for any neglect or profane-

ness. Otherwise, God requires of us and accepts from us according to what we have, and not according to what we have not.

“We see it by experience that some men’s natural spirits will carry them to a continuance in the outward observance of duties much beyond, nay, doubly perhaps to what others are able, who yet may observe the holy Sabbath to the Lord with acceptance. And herein lies the spring of the accommodation of these duties to the sick, the aged, the young, the weak, or persons any way distempered. God ‘knoweth our frame and remembereth we are dust,’ so also that the dust is more discomposed and weakly compacted in some than others. As thus the people gathered manna of old, some more, some less, ‘every man according to his appetite,’ yet he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack’ (Exo. 16:17-18). So is everyone in sincerity, according to his own ability, to endeavour the sanctifying of the name of God in the duties of this day, not being obliged by the examples or prescriptions of others, according to their own measures.”

Commenting on the cautions of Isaiah 58:13 Owen said, “I no way think that here is a restraint laid on us from such words, ways and works, as neither hinder the performance of any religious duties belonging to the due celebration of the worship of God on His day, nor are apt in themselves to unframe our spirits or divert our affections from them. And those whose minds are fixed in a *spirit of liberty* to glorify God in and by this day of rest, seeking after communion with Him in the ways of His worship, will be to themselves a better rule for their words and actions, than those who may aim to reckon over all they do or say, which may be done in such a manner as to become the Judaical Sabbath much more than the Lord’s Day.

“Although the day be wholly to be dedicated to the ends of a sacred rest before insisted on, yet duties in their performance *drawn out* to such a length as to beget wearisomeness tend not to edification, nor promote the sanctification of the name of God in the worship itself. Regard therefore in all such performances is to be had unto *the weakness* of the natural constitution of some, the infirmities and indisposition of others who are not able to abide in the outward part of duties as others can. And there is no wise shepherd who will rather suffer the stronger sheep of his flock to lose somewhat of what they might reach to in his guidance of them, than to compel the weaker to keep pace with them to their hurt, and it may be to their ruin. Better a great number should complain of the shortness of some duties, who have strength and desires for a longer continuance in them, than that a few who are sincere should be really discouraged by being overburdened, and have the service thereby made useless to them.”

We cannot do better to close this article than by giving the prayer of the godly Baxter:—“O most glorious and gracious Creator and Redeemer, I humbly return my unfeigned thanks for the unspeakable mercies which I have received on Thy Day; and much more, for so great a mercy to all Thy churches and the world: and craving the pardon of the sins which I have committed on Thy Day, I beseech Thee to continue this exceeding mercy to Thy churches and to me, that its blessed privileges and comforts may not be forfeited and lost; and let me serve Thee in the life and light and love of Thy Spirit in these Thy holy days on earth, till I be prepared for and received into the everlasting rest in heavenly glory. Amen.”—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

13. *Its Publication.*

The value of this blessed doctrine appears in its suitability and sufficiency to stabilize and settle true Christians in the certainty of their salvation. When regenerated souls are enabled to believe that the glorification of the elect is so infallibly fixed in God's eternal purpose that it is impossible for any of them to perish, and when they are enabled to Scripturally perceive that they themselves belong to the people of God's choice—how it strengthens and confirms their faith. Nor is such a confidence presumptuous—though any other most certainly is so—for every genuinely converted person has the right to regard himself as belonging to that favoured company, since the Holy Spirit quickens none but those who were predestinated by the Father and redeemed by the Son. This is a hope “which maketh not ashamed,” for it cannot issue in disappointment when entertained by those in whose hearts the love of God is shed abroad by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

The holy assurance which issues from a believing apprehension of this grand Truth is forcibly set forth by the Apostle in the closing verses of Romans 8. There he assures us, “Whom He did *predestinate*, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also *glorified*” (v. 30). Such a beginning guarantees such an end: a salvation which originated in past eternity must be consummated in future eternity. From such grand premises Paul drew the blessed conclusion, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31). And again, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?” (v. 33). And yet again: “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35). If such precious streams issue from this fountain, then how great is the madness and how heinous the sin of those who desire to see it choked. The everlasting security of Christ's sheep cannot be presented in its full force until we base it upon the Divine decree.

How apt the trembling believer is to doubt his final perseverance, for sheep (both natural and spiritual) are timid and self-distrustful creatures. Not so the wild and wayward goats: true to their type, they are full of carnal confidence and fleshly boasting. But the believer has such a sense of his own weakness, such a sight of his sinfulness, such a realization of his fickleness and instability, that he literally works out his own salvation “in fear and trembling.” Moreover, as he sees so many who did run well doing so no longer; so many who made such a fair and promising profession end by making shipwreck of the faith—the very sight of their apostasy causes him to seriously question his own state and latter end. It is to stabilize their hearts that God has revealed in His Word that those who are enabled to see in themselves the marks of *election* may rejoice in the certainty of their everlasting blessedness.

Let us also point out what a stabilizing effect the apprehension of this grand Truth has upon the true servant of God. How much there is to dishearten him: the fewness of those who attend his ministry. The opposition made to those portions of the Truth which most exalt God and abase man. The scarcity of any visible fruits attending his labours. The charge by some of his officers or closest friends that if he continues along such lines he will have no one at all left to preach to. The whisperings of Satan that God Himself is frowning on such efforts, that he is a rank failure and had better quit—these and other considerations have a powerful tendency to fill him with dismay or tempt him to trim his sails and float along the tide of popular sentiment. We know whereof we write, for we have personally trod this thorny path.

Ah, but God has graciously provided an antidote for Satan's poison, and an effectual cordial to revive the drooping spirits of His sorely-tried servants. What is this? The knowledge that their Master has not sent them forth to draw a bow at a venture, but rather to be instruments in His hand of accomplishing His eternal decree. Though He has commissioned them to preach the Gospel unto all who attend their ministry, yet He has also made it plain in His Word that it is not His purpose that all or even that many should be saved thereby. He has made it known that His flock is (Greek) a "very little" one (Luke 12:32), that there is only "a *remnant* according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5), that the "many" would be found on the Broad Road that leads to destruction and that only a "few" would walk that Narrow Way that leads unto life.

It is for the calling out from the world of this chosen remnant and for the feeding and establishing of them that God chiefly employs His servants. It is the due apprehension and personal belief of this which tranquilizes and stabilizes the minister's heart as nothing else will. As he rests upon the sovereignty of God, the efficacy of His decrees, the absolute certainty that God's counsels shall be fully realized—then he is assured that whatever God has sent him forth to do *must* be accomplished, that neither man nor devil can prevent it. Appalled by the ruin all around him, humiliated by his own sad failures, yet he perceives that the outworking of the Divine plan is infallibly ensured. Those whom the Father ordained *will* believe (Acts 13:48). Those for whom the Son died *must* be saved (John 10:16). Those whom the Spirit quickens *shall* be effectually preserved (Phil. 1:6).

When the minister receives a message to deliver in the name of his Master he may rest with unshaken confidence on that promise, "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it (not "may") *shall* accomplish that which I please, and it *shall* prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). It may not accomplish what the *preacher* wishes nor prosper to the extent which the saints desire, but no power on earth or in Hell can prevent the fulfillment of God's will. If God has marked out a certain person to be brought unto a saving knowledge of the Truth under a particular sermon, then no matter how buried in sin that soul may be, nor how hard he may kick against the pricks of conscience, he shall (like Paul of old) be made to cry, "Lord, what wouldest Thou have me to do?" Here, then, is a sure resting place for the minister's heart. This was where *Christ* found consolation, for when the nation at large despised and rejected Him, He consoled Himself with the fact that, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37).

The value of this doctrine appears again in that it provides real encouragement to praying souls. Nothing so promotes the spirit of holy boldness at the Throne of Grace as the realization that God is *our* God and that we are the people of *His* choice. They are His peculiar treasure, the very apple of His eye, and they above all people have His ear. "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him" (Luke 18:7). Assuredly He shall do so, for they are the only ones who supplicate Him in meekness, presenting their requests in subjection to His sovereign pleasure. O, my readers, when we are on our knees, how this fact that God set His heart upon us from everlasting must inspire fervency and faith. Since God chose to love us, can He refuse to hear us?! Then let us take courage from our predestination to make more earnest supplication.

"But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto Him" (Psa. 4:3). " 'But know.' Fools will not learn, and therefore

they must again and again be told the same thing, especially when it is such a bitter truth which is to be taught them—the fact that the godly are the chosen of God, and are, by distinguishing grace, set apart and separated from other men. Election is a doctrine which unrenowned man cannot endure, but nevertheless it is a glorious and well-attested truth, and one which should comfort the tempted believer. Election is the guarantee of *complete* salvation, and an argument for success at the Throne of Grace. He who chose us for Himself will surely hear our prayers. The Lord's elect shall not be condemned nor shall their cry be unheard. David was king by Divine decree, and we are the Lord's people in the same manner—let us tell our enemies to their faces that they fight against God and destiny, when they strive to overthrow our souls” (C. H. Spurgeon).

Not only does a knowledge of the truth of election afford encouragement to praying souls, but it supplies important instruction and guidance therein. Our petitions ought ever to be framed in harmony with Divine Truth. If we believe in the doctrine of predestination we should pray accordingly. The language we use should be in agreement with the fact that we believe there are a company of persons chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and that it was for *them*, and *them alone*, He suffered and died. If we believe in *particular redemption* (rather than in an universal atonement) we should beg the Lord Jesus to have respect unto such as He has purchased by His soul's travail. This will be a means of keeping up right apprehensions in our own minds, as it will also be setting a proper example in this matter before others.

In the present day there are many deplorable expressions made use of in prayer, which are utterly unjustifiable, yea, which are altogether opposed to the will or Word of the Lord. How often the modern pulpit asks for the salvation of all present, and the head of the household requests that not one in the family miss eternal glory. To what purpose is this? Are we going to direct the Lord, who He shall save? Let us not be misunderstood: we are not against the preacher praying for his congregation, nor the parent for his family; that which we are opposed to is that praying which is in direct opposition unto the Truth of the Gospel. Prayer must be subordinated to the Divine decrees, otherwise we are guilty of rebellion. When praying for the salvation of others, it should always be with the proviso, “If they be Thine elect” or “if it be Thy sovereign will,” or with some similar qualification.

The Lord Jesus has left us a perfect example in this, as in everything else. In His great High Priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, we find Him saying, “I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine” (v. 9). Our Lord knew the whole of His Father's good will and pleasure towards the elect. He knew that the act of election was a sovereign and irreversible act in His mind. He knew that He Himself could not add one to the number of the chosen. He knew that He was sent from the Father to live and die for them, and them only. And in perfect agreement with this He declared, “I pray for *them*: I pray not for the world.” If, then, Christ left out the world—if He prayed not for the non-elect, neither should we. We must learn of Him and follow His steps, and instead of resenting, be well pleased with the whole good pleasure of God's sovereign will.

To be submissive unto the Divine will is the hardest lesson of all to learn. By nature we are self-willed and anything which crosses us is resented. The upsetting of our plans, the dashing of our cherished hopes, the smashing of our idols stirs up the enmity of the flesh. A miracle of grace is required in order to bring us into unrepining acquiescence to

God's dealings with us, so that we say from the heart, "It is the LORD, let Him do what seemeth Him good" (1 Sam. 3:18). And in bringing this miracle to pass, God uses *means*. He impresses on our hearts an effectual sense of His sovereignty so that we are brought to realize that He has the unqualified right to do as He pleases with His creatures. And no other truth has such a powerful tendency to teach us this vital lesson as has the doctrine of election. A saving knowledge of the fact that God chose us unto salvation begets within us a readiness for Him to order all our affairs, till we cry, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

Now in view of all these considerations, we ask the reader, ought not the doctrine of election be plainly and freely proclaimed? If God's Word be full of it. If the Gospel cannot be Scripturally preached without it. If the grace of God cannot be maintained when it is suppressed. If the proclamation of it abases man into the dust. If it be a Divinely appointed means of faith. If it be a powerful incentive unto the promotion of holiness. If it stirs in the soul the spirit of praise. If it establishes the Christian in the certainty of his security. If it be such a source of stability to the servant of God. If it supplies encouragement to praying souls and affords valuable instruction therein. If it works in us a sweet submission to the Divine will—then shall we refuse to give unto God's children this valuable bread merely because dogs snap at it? Shall we withhold from the sheep this vital ingredient of their food simply because the goats cannot digest it?

And now, in conclusion, a few words on *how* this doctrine should be published. First, it ought to be presented *basically*. This is not all incidental or secondary truth, but one of fundamental importance and therefore it is not to be crowded into a corner, nor spoken of with bated breath. Predestination lies at the very foundation of the entire scheme of Divine Grace. This is clear from Romans 8:30, where it is mentioned *before* effectual calling, justification and glorification. It is clear again from the order followed in Ephesians 1, where election (v. 4) *precedes* adoption, our acceptance in the Beloved and our having redemption through His blood (vv. 5-7). The minister must therefore make it clear to his hearers that God first chose a people to be His peculiar treasure, then sent His Son to redeem them from the curse of the broken law, and now gives the Spirit to quicken them and bring them to everlasting glory.

Second, it ought to be preached *fearlessly*. God's servants must not be intimidated by the frowns of men nor deterred from performing their duty by any form of opposition. The minister of the Gospel is called upon to, "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3), and soldiers who fear the foe or take to flight are of no service to their king. The same holds good of those who are officers of the King of kings. How fearless was the Apostle Paul! How valiant for the Truth were Luther and Calvin, and the thousands of those who were burned at the stake because of their adherence to this doctrine. Then let not those whom Christ has called to preach the Gospel conceal this Truth because of the fear of man, for the Master has plainly warned them, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My Words, this evil and adulterous generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" (Mark 8:38).

Third, it is to be preached *humbly*. Fearlessness does not require us to be bombastic. The holy Word of God must ever be handled with reverence and sobriety. When the minister stands before his people they ought to feel by his demeanour that he has come to them from the audience-chamber of the Most High, that the awe of Jehovah rests upon his soul. To preach upon the sovereignty of God, His eternal counsels, His choosing of

some and passing by of others, is far too solemn a matter to be delivered in the energy of the flesh. There is a happy medium between a cringing, apologetic attitude, and adopting the style of a political tirade. Earnestness must not degenerate into vulgarity. It is “in *meekness*” we are to instruct those that oppose themselves “if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth” (2 Tim. 2:25).

Fourth, it is to be preached *proportionately*. Though the foundation be of first importance, it is of little value unless a superstructure be erected upon it. The publication of election is to make way for the other cardinal truths of the Gospel. If any doctrine be preached exclusively it is distorted. There is a balance to be preserved in our presentation of the Truth—while no part of it is to be suppressed, no part of it is to be made unduly prominent. It is a great mistake to harp on one string only. Man’s responsibility must be enforced as well as God’s sovereignty insisted upon. If on the one hand the minister must not be intimidated by Arminians, on the other he must not be brow-beaten by hyper-Calvinists, who object to the calling upon the unconverted to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15).

Fifth, it is to be preached *experimentally*. This is how the Apostles dealt with it, as is clear from, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). But how can this be done unless we are taught the doctrine of election, instructed in the nature and use of it? The truth of election can be of small comfort to any man until he has a well-grounded assurance that *he is* one of God’s chosen people; and that is possible only by ascertaining that he possesses (in some measure) the Scriptural marks of Christ’s sheep. As we have already dealt with this aspect of our subject at some length, we will say no more.

May it please the Lord to rise these poor articles unto His own glory and the blessing of His dear saints.—A.W.P.

THE OPPRESSION OF MAN.

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:134). But *how* is this to be asked? First, this is not to be asked as our main blessing: “seek ye *first* the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). If we seek our ease and temporal felicity only, *that* prayer is like a brutish cry: “And they have not cried unto Me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds” (Hosea 7:14). A dog will howl when he feels anything inconvenient. You will never be freed from murmuring and quarrelling at God’s dispensations and questioning His love, if this be the first thing that you seek; and so your prayers will become your snare. Besides the great dishonour to God, it argues the great disorder of your affections that you can be content to have anything apart from God: “Seek ye the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore” (Psa. 105:4). In all conditions *that* must be our great request, that we may have the favour of God.

Second, it must be asked with submission. It is not absolutely promised, nor intrinsically and indispensably necessary to our happiness, but if the Lord sees fit for His own glory and our good. We cannot take it ill if a friend refuses to lend us a sum of money which he knows will be to our loss and detriment. God sees fit, sometimes, for His own glory and our good, to continue us under oppression, rather than take us out of it. There are two acts of Providence: relieving and comforting the oppressed, and punishing the oppressors. Sometimes God does the one without the other, sometimes both together. Sometimes God will only comfort the oppressed; we cry to Him in our afflictions, and God will not break the yoke but give us strength to bear it: “in the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and hast strengthened me with strength in my soul” (Psa. 138:3). He gives you strength to bear the burden, if you continue in your integrity. Sometimes God does punish the oppressor, yet that is no relief to you. You must bear it, for you are to stand to God’s will and to wait His leisure to free you from it.

Third, your end must be that God may be glorified, and that you may serve Him more cheerfully. So it is in the text. And again, “Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death; that I may show forth all Thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion; and I will rejoice in Thy salvation” (Psa. 9:13, 14). David begs salvation in order to praise. Temporal mercy should not be loved for itself, nor sought for itself; but as we may glorify God by it: that is to be our end. Lord, I seek not my own interest, but Thine. If you have a carnal end, you miss: “Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3)—that ye may please the flesh.

Fourth, we must pray in faith, that God can deliver from the oppression of man, and will do so in due time, when it is good for us. Though our oppressors be ever so mighty, God can break their power, or change their heart. It is a great relief to the soul to consider the several ways that God has to right us. “Then had the churches rest . . . and were multiplied” etc., (Act. 9:31). When was that? When Paul was converted. He was an active instrument against the Church, and God turned his heart; then had the churches rest. Or the Lord may do it by determining their interests that they shall show favour to His people though their hearts be not changed: “when a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:7). Please men, and you cannot say God is your Friend; but please God, and He makes your enemies at peace with you. There is much in the secret chain of Providence: see Daniel 1:9. God can break the yoke by raining judgments on them: see Isaiah 49:24, 25. Therefore we should not be dis-

discouraged with unlikelihood when we go to God, who has many ways which poor shortsighted creatures cannot foresee.

God is ready to deliver us. The love which the Lord has for His afflicted people will not suffer His justice to be quiet very long. That God is ready to help and deliver will appear from these things. 1. It is His nature to pity and show mercy to the oppressed and to revenge the oppressor. He pities the afflictions of them that suffer justly, and far beneath their desert, from His own hand: “they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD, and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel” (Judg. 10:16 and cf. 2 Kings 14:26)—how much more will He pity them that are unworthily oppressed! And the Lord’s pitiful nature does incline Him to deliver His people: and when the oppressed cry, “I will hear them; for I am gracious” (Exo. 22:21-27).

2. It is His usual practice and custom: “the LORD executeth judgment and righteousness for all that are oppressed” (Psa. 103:6). If for all; surely for His people. He sits in Heaven to rectify the disorders of men: see Psalm 34:19. 3. It is His office as Judge of the world: “Lift up Thyself, Thou judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud” (Psa. 94:2). Look upon Him only in that notion, according to our natural conceptions, as the supreme cause and Judge of all things. Again, His office as Protector of His people: He is in covenant with them, He is their Sun and Shield, His people’s Refuge in time of trouble (Psa. 9:9), when they have none else to flee to.

Now for instruction to teach us what to do when we are oppressed. First, patience. It is the lot of God’s children to be often troubled with the world: and badly used. Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, and his subjects cannot endure those who would overturn his kingdom. The good are few, and therefore must look to be oppressed. If there be any breathing room it is God’s mercy. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12 and cf. Gal. 4:29).

Second, let us be prepared to commend our cause to God: “LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their hearts, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear: to judge the fatherless and the oppressor that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psa. 10-17, 18). God prepares the hearts of the humble, How so? By continuing the trouble till they are sensible of the misery of the sin—of the cause. “I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offenses and seek My face” (Hosea 5:15).

Third, when you have prayed, then wait. It is a good sign when we are engaged in prayer, and encouraged to wait. When God has a mind to work, He sets the spirit of prayer at work. How can our prayers be heard when we regard them not ourselves and expect no issue? How should God hear when we pray out of course and do not think our prayers worth the regarding? “I waited patiently for the LORD, He inclined unto me and heard my cry” (Psa. 40:1). “I will watch to see what He will say” (Hab. 2:1). Look for an answer: God does not usually disappoint a waiting people.

When God delivers us from the oppression of man we should be quickened and encouraged in His service. First, because every mercy infers an answerable duty: “But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done unto him” (2 Chron. 32:25). There must be rendering according to the receiving. Second, this is the fittest return, partly because it is real, not verbal. The Lord cares not for words—He knows the secret springs of the heart: see Psalm 50:23. It is good to be speaking good of God’s name. This is one way of glorifying, but ordering the conversation aright is that which is most pleasing to Him. And partly, too, because our fear and sorrow are taken away: “I will run the way of

Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Psa. 119:32 and see Luke 1:74, 75).

We are now under the sad effects of our former unthankfulness, and by remembering our duty we may see our sin. Ingratitude and walking unanswerably to received mercy is the great and crying sin of God’s people; therefore we should humble ourselves that we did so little good and that God had so little glory and service from us in former times of liberty. Now God by His present providence shows us the difference: “Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies” etc., (Deut. 28:47, 48 and see 2 Chron. 12:8). We must be humbled for the abuse of former mercies before we seek new.

Thus we may know (from the second part of our text) what to have in our eye when we are asking for mercies. The end is first in intention, though last in execution. Do not pray to serve thy lusts more freely, nor think how to execute revenge, nor how we should be provided for—but what glory and service we may bring to God: see Psalm 75:2. It also teaches us how to make our promises to God. When you promise duty and obedience to Him, be sure to be sincere and holy; make due provision that it may be so by mortifying the roots of such distempers as will betray us. When a people in a low condition have a real inclination to praise and glorify God by their mercies as soon as they shall receive them, it is an argument that He will hear.—Thomas Manton.