

**Volume 22—Studies in the Scriptures—June, 1943**  
**GOD GOVERNING THE NATIONS.**

“Repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15): “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Unless there be both repentance and faith there is no forgiveness of sins for any soul, yet there are comparatively few passages in which both of them are expressly *mentioned*. In Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38 and 17:30 “repentance” alone is inculcated. In John 3:15; Romans 1:16 and 10:4 only “believing” is specified. Why is this? Because the Scriptures are not written as lawyers draw up documents, wherein terms are needlessly repeated and multiplied. Each passage of the Word must be interpreted in the light of and consistently with “the Analogy of Faith” (Rom. 12:6, Greek)—the general tenor of Scripture—and none made exceptional to the general rule. Thus concerning the above references: where only “repentance” is mentioned, “believing” is implied, and when “believing” is found alone, “repentance” is presupposed. The same principle applies to all other subjects: for example, prayer, “Ask, and ye shall receive” (Matt. 7:7) is not to be taken without qualification: if we are to “receive, we must “ask” *aright*—believingly (Heb. 11:6), according to God’s will (1 John 5:14), in the name of Christ (John 14:13), and so on.

Our object in beginning with the above was to pave the way for an explanatory word on what was before us last month. Not a few have been puzzled over Jonah’s positive and unqualified declaration, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (3:4), for such an announcement of disaster appeared to hold out no hope of escape. This affords a striking example of the necessity for interpreting each passage in the light of and in harmony with the Analogy of Faith. Now it is one of the established maxims of Scripture that where there is genuine repentance and reformation God will show mercy and stay His judgments. This is plainly stated in such places as Leviticus 26:40-42; 1 Kings 8:33-36, yet it is not formally expressed in every chapter or even every book. When God’s Prophets were sent forth to announce judgments it was (except in extreme cases) with the proviso that the people threatened would be spared if they forsook their wickedness and returned to the paths of virtue. It was unnecessary to always *state* this because it was plainly revealed in the general rule.

Thus, when Jonah proclaimed the overthrow of Nineveh, though he specified not the *means* by which judgment could be arrested, yet they were understood—a reprieve would be granted if there were true repentance. Consequently his proclamation was no heralding of God’s inexorable fiat but rather the sounding of an alarm which operated as a means of moral suasion. Had Nineveh obstinately persisted in her sins, she would certainly have been promptly overthrown; but because she ceased from being a city where every form of wickedness ran riot and became a place where the name of God was feared and His authority respected, her doom was averted. Jonah was not disclosing the Divine decree, but rather spoke ethically, addressing himself to human responsibility. And when it is said that, “God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them,” He deigned to use a familiar form of speech. There was no change in His eternal purpose but an alteration in His *bearing* toward them because their conduct had changed for the better.

That our explanation of Jonah 3:4-10 is no mere plausible attempt or subtle device of getting out of a “tight place” should be quite evident from Jeremiah 18. “At what instant I should speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and destroy it; *if* that nation against whom I have pronounced (not “decreed”!),

turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them” (vv. 7, 8). Though the threat be genuine and the danger real, yet the announcement of judgment is not an absolute one, but *qualified*, and when the qualification is not expressed it is *implied*. The implied reserve that God will deal in mercy with those who genuinely put right that which displeases Him and will not destroy such was perceived and appealed to by Abram when he said, “That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

Even though no particular notice be taken of other passages and attention be entirely confined unto what is recorded in Jonah 3, will not the thoughtful reader be struck by the very terms of the Prophet’s announcement: “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown”? Had the guilt of Nineveh been so great and her course in evil so long confirmed, why was any intimation of her destruction at all necessary? If her doom was fixed, if God had purposed her overthrow, then why send one of His Prophets to declare the same? Further, why pronounce Nineveh’s judgment almost six weeks before it should be executed? Ah, did not that very interval suggest that a door of hope stood open if her people would humble themselves and avail themselves of it? Was not that very interval an intimation of mercy in reserve? Was it not as much as though God said, “I gave her space to repent” (Rev. 2:21)? But if we compare Scripture with Scripture (and we are ever the losers by failing to do so) then the “forty days” confirms the conclusion we have drawn, for forty is the number which expresses probation and testing: see Deuteronomy 8:2-4; Acts 7:30; Matthew 4:2, etc.

How what above has been before us exemplifies the wondrous patience and forbearance of God! How it demonstrates that His anger is not like ours—a violent passion which ebbs and flows—but rather the calm and deliberate expression of His insulted holiness upon those who despise His authority and refuse to seek unto His mercy. God warns before He smites, expostulates ere He punishes, gives ample time and opportunity for an escape from His judgments. Enoch and Noah preached for many years before the flood destroyed the world. Prophet after Prophet was sent unto Israel before God banished them into captivity. Almost forty years passed after the Jews crucified their Messiah ere Jerusalem was razed to the ground. Well nigh six thousand years have gone since the Fall of our first parents, and yet human history has not closed! The Lord is “slow to anger,” yet that slowness is neither indifference to evil nor slackness in dealing with the same—rather is it a proof that He “bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.”

Still another purpose is served by the slowness of God unto anger and the interval between a nation’s degeneracy and the execution of Divine judgment upon it, and that is, it serves to test more completely human responsibility and make manifest how richly deserved is the retribution which overtakes evildoers. If God’s slowness to anger evidences His forbearance, how the general response of men thereto displays the inveteracy of their wickedness. “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). Because God keeps silent they imagine He is altogether such an one as themselves (Psa. 50:21). “Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness” (Isa. 26:10). Despising the riches of God’s goodness and longsuffering, after the hardness of his impenitent heart, man treasures up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:4, 5). And

thus is it made apparent that he is “without excuse” and that his “damnation is just.”—  
A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

### 26. *Profession Tested*: Matthew 7:22-23.

There are few passages in all the Word of God which are more solemn than Matthew 7:21-23 and which are more calculated to induce the sober believer to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Certainly this writer regards it as much too important to skim over hastily. In these verses the Lord makes it known that there are those who regard themselves as genuine Christians merely because they have certain resemblances to the children of God, and who are even looked upon as such by others simply because of their outward conformity to the principles and ordinances of Christianity, and yet are denounced by Christ as "ye that work iniquity." So presumptuous are they that they are firmly convinced Heaven is theirs, yea, they are here represented as complaining to their Judge when He closes the door against them, putting in a plea for their claim at the bar of justice and arguing as though it were unfair that they should be excluded from the everlasting bliss of the righteous. Thus it is clearly implied that they lived and died in the full assurance they were the objects of God's approbation, that they were completely secured from the wrath to come.

Nor is this fatal delusion cherished by a comparative few, for our Lord here gives plain intimation that there are "many" who have implicit confidence in their salvation, but who will nevertheless hear from His lips those terrible words, "depart from Me." How is their infatuation to be explained? The general answer would be the deceitfulness of the human heart plus the sophistries of Satan. But on so deeply a serious matter as this we need something more than generalizations. When a thoughtful person learns that some dangerous disease is menacing the community, he wants to learn all he can about its nature, its symptoms, and especially the best means of prevention, of safeguarding himself against it. If we deem no pains and care too much in fortifying ourselves against a bodily disease, will the reader complain at the slowness of the writer's progress if he endeavours to give a more specific and detailed answer to this weighty question?—how shall we account for such a fatal confidence? We will seek to point out the grounds on which such a delusion rests, that we may avoid this woeful mistake.

1. *Ignorance*. Last month we showed at some length the insufficiency of a mere intellectual acquaintance with the letter of Scripture, but let it not be concluded therefrom that a notional knowledge of the Truth is of no value because it falls short of a saving one, still less derive encouragement for slothfulness. It is in the use of *means* that God is often pleased to meet with souls, and while they are reading and meditating on His Word, to shine into their hearts. Scripture places no premium upon ignorance or indolence. Instead of saying, If such knowledge will not bring a man to Heaven to what purpose is it to labour after knowledge? rather ask yourself, How far must I be from Heaven if I lack even that knowledge?! What we brought out on the subject of a notional knowledge of the Truth last month, instead of affording comfort to the ignorant should rather strike them with fear and trembling. If so much knowledge will not secure salvation, then how much worse is my case when I am destitute of what even he possesses? If those who come so near to the kingdom as to be able to view it and yet not enter, then what hope is there for those who are content to remain far off from it?

So near are the ignorant to Hell that they are within the very shadow of it. "Darkness and the shadow of death" are joined together in Scripture (Matt. 4:16). Ignorance is spiritual darkness, the very shadow of eternal death. There is but a thin partition between

those immersed in spiritual ignorance and Hell itself. Hell is termed “the *outer* darkness” (Matt. 8:12), because ignorance is the inner darkness, the next room as it were to Hell itself. Sad, indeed, is the condition of such. If those who come so near to Canaan as to obtain a taste of its wondrous fruits and yet fall in the wilderness so that they never entered in, how can they expect to enter Canaan who refuse to stir out of Egyptian darkness? One with much knowledge may possibly perish, but one who is quite ignorant of spiritual things shall *certainly* perish. When God makes mention of “a people of no understanding,” He at once adds, “therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them” (Isa. 27:11). “Where ignorance is bliss ‘tis folly to be wise,” certainly does not hold good here.

We do not have to go so far afield today as what is termed heathendom, there are millions within Christendom, yea, countless thousands of church goers and members who know not what is necessary to bring a soul to Heaven. They know not that regeneration is imperative, that “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” that as a fish cannot live out of water because away from its own element, so man is totally unfit for communion with the Holy One until he be renewed within. They know not that there must be a new creation, a miracle of grace wrought in the soul to make fallen man a new creature, so that it can be said of him, “old things are passed away, behold all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The new Jerusalem is for new creatures. They know not that God must communicate to the heart a principle of holiness before there can be any holy affections, motions or fruits. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14) and by nature man does not have the least grain of it.

So ignorant are the vast majority of those even in places reputed to be sound and orthodox that they know not there must be the denying of self before anyone can become a follower of Christ: a repudiation of our own wisdom, righteousness, strength, desires, will, and interests. They know not there must be a renunciation of the world before anyone can be a follower of Him who left the glories of Heaven and entered the manger of Bethlehem: that we must be crucified unto the world and the world unto us or we shall never enter into the benefits and blessings purchased by the crucifixion of Christ. They know not that there must be a plucking out of right eyes and a cutting off of right hands, a mortifying of the flesh with its affections and lusts, so that we die daily. They know not that there must be a taking up of the cross if any man will come after Christ, which will cost him the loss of godless companions, the scorn of professors, many a tear and groan. They know not that the Christian life is a fierce wrestling (Eph. 6:12), a continual fight, a race that has to be run with all our might if the crown is to be obtained. If they really knew these things, they would not be nearly so confident of Heaven when they are total strangers to the very things required of all those for whom Heaven is intended.

2. *Negligence and slothfulness.* Those who *do* have a vague and general idea of the things mentioned above are too indolent to lay them to heart, make them their chief concern and prayerful meditation, that they may understand them more clearly. Even if they know them they will not take the pain to seriously examine their state by them: they will not go to the trouble of comparing their hearts with the Divine rule. So little interested are they in the eternal welfare they will not spare a few hours to solemnly inquire whether or not they measure up to what the Word of God requires of them. Alas for the wretched carelessness of the vast majority concerning their souls and everlasting state. They conduct themselves as atheists, acting as though there is no God, no day of reckoning, no

lake of fire. They carry themselves as madmen, chasing shadows, playing with dynamite, sporting on the edge of the Pit. They are indeed beside themselves (Luke 15:17), devoid of "the spirit of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). If they were sane they would study God's Word to discover its directions concerning salvation and would test themselves by those directions.

Their very indifference and carelessness demonstrates the mass of our fellows to be practical atheists and spiritual lunatics. If they were sane they would be deeply concerned whether Heaven or Hell was to be their eternal abode. They would deem no trouble too great to ascertain which they were journeying unto, which their personal condition fitted them for. They would snatch a few of their swiftly passing hours and devote them to diligent inquiry and self-examination. They would not proffer idle excuses and postpone the task, but would promptly and earnestly set about it. Only those bereft of spiritual sense and reason would neglect a matter the issue of which is either everlasting life or everlasting death. But no—rather than seriously trouble themselves, they will complacently assume all is well with them and take it on trust they are bound for Heaven, when the only grounds they have for such trust are the lies of Satan and that which their own deceitful hearts prompt. They thus rest the whole weight of eternity upon a cobweb and pin the everlasting concern of their souls upon a shadow!

What makes it more inexcusable is the fact that these same people are quite competent and painstaking over their *temporal* affairs. If a new position be offered them they make careful inquiries before committing themselves. If they purpose making an investment, they go to much trouble in ascertaining the soundness of it. If they think of purchasing a property they make full investigation as to its title-deeds and value. But when it comes to *eternal* things they are dilatory and slipshod, half-hearted and lazy. They make no serious preparation to meet their God, and when His call comes it finds them wanting. They are sluggards and therefore the sluggard's portion and doom will be theirs. Thus, when men and women are so slack and careless about their souls, when they will not make serious and solemn inquiry about their state, we need not wonder that so many are so woefully mistaken as to promise themselves Heaven when in reality nothing but Hell is reserved for them.

3. *Misapprehensions of God.* Where people are in ignorance and where they are too sottish to make any real and serious effort to dispel their ignorance, false conceptions of the Divine character are certain to obtain. True, there are degrees of ignorance and therefore there are considerable differences in the erroneous ideas men form of God. But those formed by the *unregenerate*, whether they be the gross ones of the heathen or the more refined ones of Christendom, are alike false. Viewing God through the blurred lens of depraved hearts and minds they fashion Him as one suited to their corrupt inclinations. They invent a God who treats sin lightly, who looks with indulgence upon their waywardness, who is willing to accept a few religions performances as sufficient compensation for all their debt. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" is the charge which He prefers against them, but adds, "I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psa. 50:21).

They do not believe that God is inexorably just so that He will "by no means clear the guilty," but that every transgression and disobedience must receive a due recompense of reward unless a sinless Substitute make atonement for them. They do not believe it is impossible to mock God with impunity, that as men sow they reap, so that if they sow to the

flesh they must of necessity reap corruption. They do not believe that God is omniscient, that "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," for if they did it would act as a curb upon them. They do not believe God is so strict that He will call us to account for "every idle word" and that He "weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2)—the springs of action, the motives which prompt. They do not believe He is ineffably holy, so that sins of thought as well as deed, of omission as well of commission, are hateful to Him. They do not believe that God is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29) so that this world and all its works will be burned up and that everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire. They do not believe that God is absolute sovereign, so that "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

Even where there is sufficient light and conviction as to reveal to sinners that they come short of the Divine rule, and where they perceive that what the Word insists is necessary to salvation is not found in them, instead of abandoning their false hopes they persuade themselves that God is more merciful than the Scriptures represent Him to be. It is true, says the sinner, in such a case that the way to Heaven is a narrow one and that God's kingdom can only be entered "through much tribulation" (Acts 14:22), but God will save me even though I fail here and there and I be lacking in this and that. It is true that God is merciful, yet for *one sin* He banished our first parents from Eden! It is true that God is merciful, but for *one sin* His curse descended upon Ham and his posterity. It is true that God is merciful, but for *one sin* Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, Achan and his family were stoned to death, Gehazi was smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira became corpses. God is merciful, yet He sent the flood upon the world of the ungodly, rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of the plain, sent His angel and slew all the first-born of Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea.

Though they allow themselves in this sin and that, though they are thoroughly self-willed and self-pleasing, they tell themselves that God is lenient. Though they ignore God's righteous claims upon them and make no effort to meet His holy requirements, they comfort themselves with the thought that He is gracious. They refuse to allow that He is as strict and rigid as His faithful servants declare Him to be. They petulantly ask, Even though I be not precise and puritanical as some are, shall I not be saved even as they? Though I come not up to their standard, yet God is very pitiful and knows how weak we are, and therefore He will lower the standard for me so that I may be saved as well as the best of them. Poor deluded souls: if that be all their hope, their case is indeed hopeless. Will God be so merciful as to contradict Himself and go contrary to His Word? Must He show them so much mercy as to despise His own Truth and make Himself a liar!? What cause have they to tremble who have nothing to bear up their hopes of Heaven but downright blasphemy.

4. *Self-love and self-esteem.* This is as prolific and powerful a cause of self-deception as any of those mentioned above. Sinners compare themselves with their fellows and award themselves the first prize every time. He who is immoral regards himself as better than those who grind the poor and rob the widow. He who is a liar and a thief prides himself that he is no murderer. He who is outwardly religious deems himself vastly superior to the openly profane. Each one discovers some cause or other to say with the self-righteous Pharisee, "I thank God that I am not as this publican." This is because they measure themselves by a wrong standard. Even a soiled handkerchief looks compara-

tively clean if it is placed on a miry road, but were it laid on newly-fallen snow its uncleanness would soon be evident. So it is with those who are blind to their deplorable condition. Men are possessed with such a high estimate of themselves and entertain such a good opinion of their soul's condition that even if they can be induced to measure themselves by the rule of God's Word and examine their state, they come to the work prepossessed, prejudiced in their own favour. Self-love will not suffer them to deal impartially with their souls.

When they read some condemnatory passage of Scripture they refuse to appropriate it: when they hear a particularly solemn and searching sermon they take it not home to themselves but apply it to some of their fellows. If they be awakened in some measure to the awfulness of sinning against God and alarmed at the fearful punishment reserved for such, this mood is only fitful and fleeting—they quickly reassure themselves that no such guilt rests upon them. Sudden death may strike down some of their companions, but self-delusion blinds them to their own peril. A manifest judgment from God may fall upon their community, but they persuade themselves they are in no danger of the wrath to come. The fact is that there are very few, indeed, who abandon all hope, give way to utter despair and conclude *they will* experience the everlasting burnings, and yet there is only a very little company who will escape them. The multitudes continue defying God, sinning with a high hand, and go on walking along the road which leads to the Pit, and yet by one means or another each persuades himself he shall not enter there. "For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" (Psa. 36:2).

Yes, the sinner "*flattereth himself* in his own eyes." If he did not, he would be in terrible distress and anguish. He would not go on so cheerfully and gaily if he really believed himself in danger of Hell. But he has too good an estimate of himself for that: he does not think he has ever done anything worthy of such a doom. He is sure he is not bad enough for such a place. Men convince themselves they do not live in vice but are decent citizens and good neighbours. They can see no reason why God should be angry with them. They do not take His name in vain nor scoff at religion. Yea, they flatter themselves they have done much to commend themselves to Him and obtain His approbation. They read their Bibles occasionally and say their prayers. They attend church and contribute to its upkeep. They send their children to the Sabbath-School. They resolve that later on they will be even better, out and out for Christ, but meanwhile they want to enjoy the world a little longer, "trust in themselves that they are righteous" (Luke 18:9) and are comparatively clean in their own sight, and yet they are not washed from their filthiness (Prov. 30:12).

There are others, many such, who flatter themselves they are genuine Christians. They persuade themselves that they have repented of their past, believed the Gospel, and that their sins are forgiven. Consequently when they hear or read anything solemn it makes no impression upon them. Self-love and self-esteem blind them to their true condition. They are Laodiceans who say, "I am rich (spiritually) and increased with goods (have made considerable progress and grown in grace) and in need of nothing," but as the Lord declares, "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). And nothing shakes them out of their self-complacency. They continue flattering themselves "until their iniquity be found to be hateful"—until they are disillusioned in Hell. As a blind man cannot judge of colours, so prejudiced in their own favour are the self-righteous that it is impossible for them to judge of the com-



plexion of their souls, whether the image of God or the image of the Devil be stamped upon it. As one has well said, "Satan blinds one eye and self-love closes the other, and the deceitfulness of sin seals both," and thus they assure themselves they are on the way to Heaven when they are on the high road to Hell. Doubtless a number of such will read this very article and be quite unsearched by it, sure that it pertains not to *their* case.

A closing word to Christian readers. Since the four things described above are the principal ones among the more immediate causes of deceit concerning the state of the soul, then how sincerely ought the regenerate examine themselves at these points and seek to make sure they are not imposing on themselves. How they should "cease from man" and search the Scriptures without bias to ascertain the general tenor of their teaching as to *what God requires* if they are to dwell with Him forever, not confining themselves to such verses as John 3:16 and Romans 10:13, but comparing such as Isaiah 55:7; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 5:9, etc, so as to obtain a full answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" How cautiously and conscientiously should we examine ourselves, testing the grounds of our hope, determining whether or not there really is in us that which meets God's terms, whether or not our righteousness exceeds that of the religious formalist (Matt. 5:20). Nor can such a task be discharged hurriedly: "*Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10)—with what earnestness should we give ourselves to this work!

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth *Me*, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:23, 24). Yes, "knoweth Me," the living God, and not a fantasy which your own sentiment has devised. To believe in a God which has no existence save in their own imagination is the case with multitudes in the churches today. "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace" (Job. 22:21). To cherish the image of a fictitious God entails a fictitious peace. Eternal life is "to know Thee the only *true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent" (John 17:3). How we should labour after such a knowledge of Him! Finally if self-love and esteem effectually hinder an impartial examination of myself, if it be the case with a host of my fellows that "a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isa. 44:20) how earnestly should I cry to God to grant me an honest heart which desires to know the truth and nothing but the truth about my case.—A.W.P.

## THE MISSION AND MIRACLES OF ELISHA.

### 6. *Third Miracle.*

“And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up thou bald head, go up thou bald head. And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them” (2 Kings 2:23, 24). In seeking to give an exposition of this miracle let us observe, first, its *connection*. It will be noted that our passage opens with the word “And” and as there is nothing meaningless in Scripture it should be duly pondered. Nor is its force difficult to perceive, for it evidently intimates that we should observe the relation between what we find here and that which immediately precedes. The context records the wonders which God wrought through Elisha at the Jordan and at Jericho. Thus the truth which is here pointed by the conjunction is plain: when the servant has been used by his Master he must expect to encounter the opposition of the Enemy.

There is an important if unpalatable truth illustrated here, one which the minister of Christ does well to take to heart if he would be in some measure prepared for and fortified against bitter disappointment. After a season of blessing and success he must expect sore trials. After he has witnessed the power of God attending his efforts he may count upon experiencing something of the rage and power of Satan, for nothing infuriates Satan so much as beholding his victim delivered from spiritual death and set free from that which he occasioned in Eden. Elisha had been signally favoured both at the Jordan and at Jericho, but here at Bethel he hears the hiss of the Serpent and the roaring of the lion against him. Ah, the minister of the Gospel is fully aware of this principle, yea often reminds his hearers of it. He knows it was the case with his Master, for after the Spirit of God had descended upon Him and the Father had testified to His pleasure in Him, He was at once led into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Yet how quickly is this forgotten when *he* is called to pass through this contrastive experience.

It is one thing to know this truth theoretically and it is quite another to have a personal acquaintance with it. The servant of Christ is informed that the smile of Heaven upon his labours will arouse the enmity of his great Adversary, yet how often is he taken quite unawares when the storm of opposition bursts upon him! It ought not to be so, but so it usually is. “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Peter 4:12). Various indeed are the ups and downs which are encountered by those who labour in the Christian vineyard. What a striking contrast is here presented to our view! At Jericho Elisha is received with respect: the young Prophets render obeisance to him and the men of the city seek his help; here at Bethel he is contemptuously ridiculed by the children. At Jericho, the city of the curse, he is an instrument of blessing; at Bethel, which signifies “the house of God” and where blessings might therefore be expected, he solemnly pronounces a curse upon those who mock him.

Second, its *occasion*. This was the insulting of God’s servant. As Elisha was approaching Bethel, “there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him.” Upon reading this incident it is probable that some will be inclined to say, It seems that children then were much like what they are now—wild, rude, lawless, totally lacking in respect for their seniors. From this analogy the conclusion will be drawn: therefore we should not be surprised nor unduly shocked at the present day delinquency of our youth. But such a conclusion is entirely unwarranted. It is true there is “nothing new under the sun” and that

fallen human nature has been the same in every age. But it is not true that the tide of evil has always flowed uniformly, and that each generation has witnessed more or less of the appalling conduct which now mark the young in every part of Christendom. No, very far from it.

When there was an ungrieved Spirit in the churches the restraining hand of God was held upon the baser passions of mankind. That restraint operated largely through parental control—moral training in the home, wholesome instruction and discipline in the school, and adequate punishment of young offenders by the State. But when the Spirit of God is “grieved” and “quenched” by the churches, the restraining hand of the Lord is removed, and there is a fearful moral aftermath in all sections of the community. When the Divine Law is thrown out by the pulpit there inevitably follows a breakdown of law and order in the social realm, which is what we are now witnessing all over the so-called “civilized world.” That was the case to a considerable extent twenty-five years ago, and as the further an object rolls down hill the swifter becomes its momentum, so the moral deterioration of our generation has proceeded apace. As the majority of parents were godless and lawless it is not to be wondered at that we now behold such reprehensible conduct in their offspring.

Older readers can recall the time when juveniles who were guilty of theft, wanton destruction of property, and cruelty to animals, were sternly rebuked and made to smart for their wrong-doing. But a few years later such conduct was condoned and “boys will be boys” was used to gloss over a multitude of sins. So far from being shocked, many parents were pleased and regarded their erring offspring as “smart,” “precocious” and “cute.” Education authorities and psychologists insisted that children must not be suppressed and repressed but “directed” and prated about the evils inflicted on the child’s character by “inhibitions,” and corporal punishment was banished from the schools. To-day the parent who acts according to Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15 and 23:1 will not only be called a brute by his neighbours but is likely to be summoned before the courts for cruelty, and instead of supporting him the magistrate will probably censure him. The present conduct of children is not normal but abnormal. What is recorded in our passage occurred in the days of Israel’s *degeneracy*! Child delinquency is one of the plain marks of a *time of apostasy*—it was so then, it is so now.

Third, its *location*. As with the former miracles, the place where this one happened also throws much light upon that which occasioned it. Originally Bethel was called “the house of God” (Gen. 28:16-17), but now it had become a habitation of the Devil, one of the principal seats of Israel’s idolatry. It was here that Jeroboam had set up one of the calves. Afraid that he might not be able to retain his hold upon those who had revolted from Rehoboam, especially if they should go up to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices in the temple, he “made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up 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 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 for 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 which he had made” (1 Kings 12:28-32).

Thus it will be seen that so far from Bethel being a place which basked in the sunshine of Jehovah's favour it was one upon which His frown now rested. Its inhabitants were no ordinary people, but high-rebels against the Lord, openly defying Him to His face, guilty of the most fearful abominations. This it was which constituted the dark background of the scene that is here before us: this it is which accounts for the severity of the judgment which fell upon the youngest of its inhabitants: this it is which explains why these children conducted themselves as they did. What occurred here was far more than the silly prank of innocent children: it was the manifestation of an inveterate hatred of the true God and His faithful servant. Israel's worship of Baal was far more heinous than the idolatry of the Canaanites, for it had the additional and awful guilt of apostasy. And apostates are always the fiercest persecutors of those who cleave to the Truth, for the very fidelity of the latter is a witness against and a condemnation of those who have forsaken it.

Fourth, its *awfulness*. The fearful doom which overtook those children must be considered in the light of the enormity of their offense. Our degenerate generation has witnessed so much condoning of the greatest enormities that they may find it difficult to perceive how this punishment fitted the crime. The character of God has been so misrepresented by the pulpit, His claims so little pressed, the position occupied by His servants so imperfectly apprehended, that there must be a returning to the solemn teaching of Holy Writ if this incident is to be viewed in its proper perspective. Of old God said, "Touch not Mine anointed and do My Prophets no harm" (Psa. 105:15): they are His messengers, His accredited representatives, His appointed ambassadors, and an insult done to them is regarded by Him as an insult against Himself. Said Christ to His ministers, "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me" (Matt. 10:40). Conversely, he that despiseth and rejecteth the one sent forth by Christ despiseth and rejecteth Him. How little is this realized today! The curse of God now rests on many a place where His ministers were mocked.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head" (2 Kings 2:23). After the vain search which had been made for Elijah (v. 17), it is likely that some inkling of his supernatural rapture was conveyed to the Prophets at Jericho, and from them to their brethren at Bethel (v. 3), and hence we may conclude that his remarkable translation had been noised abroad—received with scepticism and ridicule by the inhabitants of Bethel. In their unbelief they would mock at it, as the apostate leaders of Christendom do not believe that the Lord Jesus actually rose again from the dead and that He ascended to Heaven in a real physical body, as they make fun of the Christian's hope of his Lord's return and of being caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Thus in saying, "Go up, thou bald head" they were, in all probability, scoffing at the tidings of Elijah's translation—scoffs put into their mouths by their elders.

"They had heard that Elijah was 'gone up to Heaven' and they insultingly bade Elisha follow him, that they might be rid of him also, and they reviled him for the baldness of his head. Thus they united the crimes of abusing him for a supposed bodily infirmity, contemptuous behaviour towards a venerable person, and enmity against him as the Prophet of God. The sin therefore of these children was very heinous: yet the greater guilt was chargeable on their parents, and their fate was a severe rebuke and awful warning to them" (Thomas Scott). How true it is that "the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). "And he turned back and looked on them" which indicates he acted calmly, and

not on the spur of the moment. "And he cursed them in the name of the Lord"—not out of personal spite, but to vindicate his insulted Master. Had Elisha sinned in cursing these children Divine providence had not executed it. This was fair warning from *God* of the awful judgment about to come upon Israel for their sins.

Fifth, its *ethics*. The passage before us is one which infidels have been quick to seize upon, and lamentable, indeed, have been many of the answers returned to them. But the Scriptures have survived every opposition of its enemies and all the purile apologies of its weak-kneed friends. Nor are the Scriptures in any danger whatever from this skeptical and blatant age. Being the Word of God they contain nothing which His servants have any need to be ashamed of, nothing which requires any explaining away. It is not our province to sit in judgment upon Holy Writ: our part is to tremble before it (Isa. 66:2), knowing that one day we shall be judged by it (John 12:48). As Jehovah was able to look after the sacred Ark without the help of any of His creatures (1 Sam. 6:10-12) so His Truth is in need of no carnal assistance from us. It is to be received without question and believed in with all our hearts. It is to be preached and proclaimed without hesitation or reservation: holding back no part of it.

Certain so-called "Christian apologists" have replied to the taunts of infidels by a process of what is termed "toning down" the passage, arguing that it was not little children but young men who were cursed by the Prophet and torn to pieces by the bears: but such an effeminate explanation is as senseless as it is needless. We quite agree with Thomas Scott when he says, "Some learned men have endeavoured to prove that these offenders were not young children but grown-up persons, and no doubt the word rendered 'children' is often used in that sense. The addition, however of the word 'little' seems to clearly evince they were not men, but young boys who had been brought up in idolatry and taught to despise the Prophets of the Lord." Others hesitate not to roundly condemn Elisha, saying he should have meekly endured their taunts in silence and that he sinned grievously in cursing them. Sufficient to point out that his Master deemed otherwise: so far from rebuking His servant, he sent the bears to fulfill his curse, and there is no appeal against *His* decision!

The passage before us is one that Dispensationalists have sought to make capital out of, supposing that it furnishes a convincing illustration and demonstration of the line they draw or rather the gulf they would make between the Old and New Testaments. Trading on the ignorance and credulity of their hearers, most of whom will readily accept the dogmatic assertions of any who pose as men with "much light," these teachers have insisted that many of the actions of the Prophets were entirely foreign to and actuated by a radically different spirit from that which was inculcated and exemplified by Christ and His Apostles. They argue that Elijah's slaying of the prophets of Baal and Elisha's cursing of the children evidences the vast difference there is between the dispensations of the Law and of Grace, and the unlearned and unwary are deceived by such clap trap. Sufficient to remind such people that Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at the denunciation of Peter and that Elymas was smitten with blindness by Paul (Acts 13:8-11)!

How blind these dispensationalists are. During the very course of why they term this "era of grace" God is even now giving the most awe-inspiring and wide-reaching proof of His wrath against those who flout His Law, visiting the earth with sorer judgments than any He has sent since the days of Noah. The New Testament equally with the Old teaches "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2

Thess. 1:6). In the incident before us God was righteously visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, as He was by the death of their children also smiting the parents in their tenderest parts. At almost the end of the Old Testament era we read that Israel “mocked the messengers of God and despised His words and *resisted His Prophets*, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:16). Here at Bethel God was giving a warning, a sample of His coming wrath, unless they reformed their ways and treated His servants better.

Sixth, its *meaning*. At first glance it certainly appears that there can be no parallel between the above action of Elisha and that which should characterize the servants of Christ, and many are likely to conclude that it can only be by a wide stretch of the imagination or a flagrant wresting of this incident that it can be made to yield anything pertinent for this age. But it must be remembered that we are not looking for a *literal* counterpart but rather a *spiritual* application, and viewing it thus our type is solemnly accurate. Ministers of the Gospel are “unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved *and* in them that perish. To the one they are the savour of death unto death and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:15, 16). Certainly the evangelist has no warrant to anathematize any who oppose him but he is *required* to pronounce accursed of God those who love not Christ and who obey not His Law (1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 3:10).

Seventh, its *sequel*. This is recorded in the closing verse of 2 Kings 2. “And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.” In the violent death of those children as the outcome of Elisha’s malediction we behold the stating of the Prophet’s Divine authority, the sign of his extraordinary office, and the fulfillment of the prediction that he should “slay” (1 Kings 19:17). After his unpleasant experience at Bethel the Prophet betook himself to Carmel, which had been the scene of Elijah’s grand testimony to a prayer-answering God (1 Kings 18). By making for the mount this servant of God intimated his need for the renewing of his strength by communion with the Most High and by meditation upon His holiness and power. Samaria was the country where the apostate portion of Israel dwelt, and by going thither Elisha manifested his readiness to be used of his Master as He saw fit in that dark and difficult field of labour.

There is only space left for us to barely mention some of the more outstanding lessons to be drawn from this solemn incident. First, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” (Rom. 11:22): if the previous miracle exemplified His “goodness,” certainly this one demonstrated His “severity”; and the one is as truly a Divine perfection as the other! Second, the words as well as actions of children, even “little children,” are noticed by God! They should be informed of this and warned against showing disrespect to God’s servants. Third, what must have been the grief of those parents when they beheld the mangled bodies of their little ones! But how much greater the anguish of parents in the Day of Judgment when they witness the everlasting condemnation of their offspring if it has been occasioned by their own negligence and evil example. Fourth, sooner or later God will certainly avenge the insults shown His ministers: this writer could relate more than one example of a horrible death overtaking one and another of those who opposed and slandered him.—A.W.P.

### THE RISEN CHRIST AND THOMAS.

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came” (John 20:24). It is remarkable that one of the disciples should have been absent from the assembly on such an interesting occasion as when Christ appeared among them after His resurrection. What was the cause of his absence it would be worse than useless to conjecture. But the intention of Divine Providence in it is obvious. It was to display the natural unbelief, as to the things of God, that is in the heart of man; and to teach us the kind of evidence that God accounts sufficient for His saving Truth.

Why was one of the disciples absent? Why was this disciple Thomas? The narrative itself affords an answer to both questions. Divine Providence intended to give us a specimen of unbelief even in His own people. Thomas was peculiarly incredulous; therefore he was the person fitted to act the part designed for him on this occasion. If Thomas was afterwards convinced, there is no room left for captiousness to allege that the fact of Christ’s resurrection was received by the disciples on slight grounds, without sufficient evidence and caution.

The unbelief of Thomas was unreasonable and sinful in a degree beyond expression. Why did he not believe the united testimony of the other Apostles? He should have received the testimony of any one of them. Unbelief justly exposed him to eternal condemnation. Has Thomas a license for unbelief more than any other of the human race? Must he not be liable to condemnation on the same ground with the rest of mankind? Must he be satisfied in his own whims with respect to the evidence of this fact? “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nail and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Did ever any infidel express a more unreasonable demand for the evidence of Christ’s resurrection and the truth of the Christian religion? The demands of skeptics are moderate and sober compared to this intemperance of unbelief. The most unreasonable of them demand only that a particular revelation of the Gospel should be made to every man. This falls far short of the extravagance of unreasonableness of the unbelief of Thomas.

But there is wisdom in this madness. If Thomas is unreasonable God uses his unreasonableness to effect a great purpose. By this means, in the satisfaction given to Thomas, we have the fact of the resurrection established on evidence beyond all suspicion. The possibility of delusion is removed; and the reality that it was Jesus whom the Apostles saw, rests not merely on the testimony of *their* eyes, but of the hands of the most unreasonable unbeliever that ever was in the world. Of all the infidels that ever existed, Thomas was the most extravagant. Voltaire and Hume are men of moderation compared to the prince of infidels. Nothing will satisfy this philosopher but the handling of the prints of the nails in his Master. Was it not possible that the risen body of Jesus should have had no scars? Was not this the most likely thing to be expected? That the Almighty power which could raise Him, could raise Him without a mark of His crucifixion? But Thomas was in all respects unreasonable that through this Jesus might exhibit Himself with evidence of His resurrection the most extravagant incredulity could presume to demand.

By this providential fact the Lord teaches us that His own disciples believe in Him not because they are naturally more teachable or less incredulous than others. It is God only who overcomes their unbelief. They are not only by nature the children of wrath even as others; but after they are brought to faith and life, the only security of their perseverance is the favour and love of God in Christ. They are kept by faith, and that faith is

not of themselves, but is the gift of God. The strongest of all the disciples of Christ would not abide in the faith for a single day, if, like Peter or like Thomas, they were to be given up to their own unbelief. But if the strongest would not stand in their strength, the feeblest will not be plucked from the hand of the heavenly Father. After the fearful example of Peter and of Thomas, let no disciple of Christ trust in his own steadfastness. We are strong only when, seeing our own weakness, we have strength in the Rock of our salvation.

The world in general and philosophers in particular look upon Christians as a weak-minded people who are prone to believe without sufficient evidence. The man of science, even when he can find no fault with the man of God, still thinks himself justifiable in considering him as utterly below himself in mental powers. He thinks there must be a soft place in his head somewhere. The best that he can find to say is, that he is "an amiable enthusiast." The Truth however, is far otherwise. Whether the believer is a man of strength of intellect, or feeble in mind, he would be equally an unbeliever with the most talented of his enemies, were he left to himself. Yea, the weakest would likely be the most presumptuous and rash, and blasphemous in the extravagance of their complaints against the Gospel. Thomas would not be behind Paine in the rashness of his demands and assertions. The Christian is made a little child by the Word and Spirit of God, but by nature he receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are to him, as well as to others, foolishness, until his eyes are opened to discover them, by the grace of God.

It is a matter of fact, worthy of particular attention, that the simplest of the men of God make a more correct and more scientific estimate of the philosopher, than the philosopher can make of him. The philosopher, with all his knowledge, knows not God by his philosophy. He knows not, then, the correct and enlightened views of the man of God on the highest of all sciences. The philosopher, not appreciating the value of the soul, nor the amount of the unspeakable glory of the heavenly inheritance, as well as of the danger of overlooking condemnation, sees not the wisdom of the conduct of the man of God. He has no way to judge him but by himself; and therefore as he himself is wise, the other must be a fool. The pleasure of knowledge and the glory of fame are, with the philosopher, the very essence of the happiness of the third heavens. In all this, the man of God, even the weakest of them, can enter into the feelings and sentiments of the men of science, for, by nature, he is such a one himself. And he still finds, in his very best moments, that if he should lose sight of Heaven, and be left of God, he would make his paradise with the philosophers, or, at least, according to his taste, with some group of those who are, in different ways, in pursuit of earthly joys.

The Christian is not amazed that men seek the praise of man more than that of God; and that they pursue the things of this world rather than the things of God. He is rather amazed that God has turned himself out of this course, and enables him to resist the temptations which he daily meets in the world. To him there is no mystery in the character and choice of the philosopher, of the sensualist, of the men of the world. In them he sees himself as he is by nature. It is with new eyes that he sees spiritual things in a correct manner. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (1 Cor. 2:14, 15). The Christian is the true philosopher. He not only has knowledge of the most sublime of all the sciences, of which the wise men of this world are as destitute as the wild



ass of the wilderness, but he has that discernment of human views and character which human wisdom never has attained. The Christian knows the philosopher better than the philosopher knows himself. Of all the sciences, the science of mind is the most sublime; and Christians have a knowledge of the mind of man which no mere philosopher can obtain by his art. The philosopher gives an account of himself and of others, and of his own notions and views which every Christian can detect as delusive and unreal.

In this providential fact we see the forbearance and condescension of Christ to His people, even when they are unreasonable. He graciously removes the doubts of Thomas, though He might justly have left him to perish in his presumptuous unbelief. From this we may be assured that, in one way or other the Lord will remove the doubts of His people with respect to the evidence of the Gospel. He will not give them that evidence which extravagance many rashly demand, He will keep them from such extravagance, or remove their doubts by opening their eyes to understand the proper evidence. This will be the same thing with presenting to their view and to their touch His hands and His side. He will assuredly overcome the unbelief and hardness of heart of the most obstinate of His chosen ones.

If He were not provoked to give up Thomas, His patience cannot meet with a more extravagant case of incredulity. He could call a Saul of Tarsus in the midst of his furious enmity to Him, and He did overcome the unbelief of the incredulous and obstinate Thomas. What a consolation is this for the believer! What thoughts of unbelief arise in the heart! And how Satan could perplex the mind of the highest saint on earth, none but the believer can have any conception of. If we were for a few minutes, from a state of the most assured faith, to be given into the hands of Satan to sift us as wheat, how would our faith fail us! Who knows what effect the fiery darts of the wicked one would have upon our minds, if they were not quenched? And quenched they cannot be but on the shield of faith: and in the case God permits that faith to fail—what then, will support us? How shall we without dismay look into an eternal world? But though God may for a moment suffer us to be tried by the tempter, He will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it. Our constant prayer to God ought to be that He would not give us into the hands of Satan, or that He will continue to give us the shield of faith.

In matters of so great moment, the mind, particularly at death, naturally looks for and wishes every evidence of the Truth, and sometimes demands unreasonable evidence. Nothing but the blood of Jesus should be before our eye and we should always remember that we glorify God, not by doubting, but by believing His Word. Were not Christ present with His people in the time of their trial, and especially at the time of their death, nothing could deliver them from horror. That they are not only saved from fear, but enabled to rejoice and triumph in death, is the surest evidence that the Gospel is true. It is not surprising that persons ignorant of the character of God, of their own character and of the consequences of sin, should be stupidly unconcerned at death. But the Christian knows too much to be kept from the very agonies of Hell if he had not the life of Heaven, when he passes through the dark valley and shadow of death. In the removal of the doubts of reason, let us gain confidence that the Lord will not forsake us in the time of our need. To a Christian, who is deeply acquainted with his own weakness, Hell itself is not a greater object of horror than to be given up without assistance from God, to wrestle with the prince of this world at the hour of death.

It is remarkable that the Lord, though He complied with the unreasonable demand for evidence in the case of Thomas, yet He would not listen to the request of the rich man in Hell, for the conviction of his relations on earth. "Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment" (Luke 16:27, 28). Did Abraham yield to the proposal and admire the plan? No. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (vv. 29-31). Our skeptics are still calling for more or better evidence. If the Gospel is true, they allege it should have evidence against which no man could find objection. Let them alone. Press on them the evidence that God has given of the truth of His Gospel. If they believe not this, it will be found, in the Day of Judgment, that they have not rejected it from its own insufficiency, but from their own enmity to the Truth. Testimony is a sufficient ground of evidence; and if they reject the testimony of God by His Apostles, they will justly perish.

And the same thing will hold true with respect to the denial of the testimony of God with regard to any particular doctrine or part thereof. The enemies of the doctrine, or fact recorded, will allege a want of proof; and, on the authority of philosophical doctrines, will take on them to modify the testimony of God. They make the dogmas of human science an authority paramount to the testimony of God in the Scriptures. This is the boldness, the blasphemy of infidelity. If God has given His testimony on any part, it is evidence paramount in authority to every other. To prove the truth alleged on such authority, nothing is necessary but to show that it is the result of the fair exposition of the laws of language. Let God be true, and let all men be liars. Against the testimony of God the philosopher is not to be heard more than a convicted perjurer. Our Lord, even though, for His own wise purposes, indulged Thomas, yet did not approve of his unbelief, nor of his demand.

He did not ascribe his incredulity to greater talents or greater caution, or greater concern about the Truth, than were discovered by his brethren. On the contrary, He shows that they rather are blessed who will believe without such evidence as Thomas demanded. There are two extremes, equally to be avoided, into which men are prone to fall. Some believe without evidence, believe against all evidence, believe what all evidence, capable of being submitted to the mind of men, shows to be absurd and impossible. On the other hand, there are some who unreasonably refuse evidence that is sufficient, evidence which God has pronounced sufficient, and look on themselves as manifesting greater intellect or greater wisdom in demanding evidence of another kind which God has not appointed. "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, yet have believed."—Alexander Carson.

## DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

### 8. *Its Safeguards.*

4. By insisting on *continuance* in well-doing. It is not how a person commences but how he ends which is the all-important matter. We certainly do not believe that one who has been born of God can perish, but one of the marks of regeneration is its *permanent* effects, and therefore I must produce those permanent fruits if my profession is to be credited. Both Scripture and observation testify to the fact that there are those who appear to run well for a season and then drop out of the race. Not only are there numbers induced to "come forward" and "join the church" under the high-pressure methods used by the professional evangelists who quickly return to their former manner of life, but there are not a few who enter upon a religious profession more soberly and wear longer. Some seem to be genuinely converted: they separate from ungodly companions, seek fellowship with God's people, manifest an earnest desire to know more of the Word, become quite intelligent in the Scriptures, and for a number of years give every outward sign of being Christians. But gradually their zeal abates, or they are offended at some wrong done them, and ultimately they go right back again into the world.

We read of a certain class "who for a while believed, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). There were those who followed Christ for a season, yet of them we read, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him" (John 6:66). There have been many such in every age. All is not gold that glitters, and not everyone who makes a promising start in the race reaches the goal. It is therefore incumbent upon us to take note of those passages which press upon us the necessity of continuance for they constitute another of those safeguards which God has placed around the doctrine of the security of His saints. On a certain occasion "many believed on Him" (John 8:30), but so far from Christ assuring them that Heaven was now their settled portion, we are told, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, IF *ye continue* in MY word then are ye My disciples indeed" (v. 31). Unless we abide in subjection to Christ, unless we walk in obedience to Him unto the end of our earthly course, we are but disciples in name and semblance.

We read of certain men who, "when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." The power of God accompanied them and richly blessed their efforts, for, "The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:20, 21). Tidings of this reached the church at Jerusalem, and mark well their response: they sent Barnabas to them, "who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would *cleave unto* the Lord" (vv. 22, 23). Barnabas was not one of those fatalistic hyper-Calvinists who argued that since God has begun a good work in them all would be well—that the Holy Spirit will care for, instruct, and guard them, whether or not they be furnished with ministerial nurses and teachers. Instead, he recognized and discharged his own Christian responsibility, dealt with them as accountable agents, addressed to them suitable exhortations, pressed upon them the indispensable duty of their cleaving to the Lord. Alas that there are so few like Barnabas today.

At a later date we find that Barnabas returned to Antioch accompanied by Paul, and while there they were engaged in "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them *to continue* in the faith" and warning them that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). How far were they from believing in a mechani-

cal salvation, reasoning that if these people had been genuinely converted they would necessarily “continue in the faith”! Writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle reminded them of the Gospel he had preached unto them and which they had received, yet failing not to add, “By which also ye are saved IF ye *hold fast* that which I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor. 15:2). In like manner he reminded the Colossians that they were reconciled to God and would be preserved unblameable and unreprieveable “IF ye *continue* in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel” (1:23). There are those who dare to say there is no “if” about it, but such people are taking direct issue with Holy Writ.

Even when writing to a minister of the Gospel, his own “son in the faith,” Paul hesitated not to exhort him, “Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them,” adding, “for in doing *this* thou shalt both save thyself (from apostasy) and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). To the Hebrews he said, “But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house are we, IF we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm *unto the end*” (3:6). And again, “For we are made partakers of Christ IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (3:14). How dishonestly has the Word of God been handled by many! Such passages as these are never heard from many pulpits from one year’s end to another. It is much to be feared that many pastors of “Calvinistic” churches are afraid to quote such verses lest their people should charge them with Arminianism. Such will yet have to face the Divine indictment “Ye have not kept My ways, but have been *partial* in the Law” or Word (Mal. 2:9).

We find precisely the same thing in the writings of another Apostle. James though addressing those whom he terms, “my beloved brethren,” calls upon his readers, “But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was (that is, nothing but a superficial and fleeting effect is produced upon him). But whoso looketh into the perfect Law of liberty, and *continueth* therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (1:22-25). The word for “beholdeth” is a metaphor taken from those who not only glance at a thing but bend their bodies towards it that they may carefully scrutinize it—used in Luke 24:12, and 1 Peter 1:12; denoting earnestness of desire, and diligent enquiry. To “continue therein” signifies a persevering study of the Truth, and abiding in the belief of and obedience to the same, thereby evidencing our *love* for it. Many have a brief taste for it, but their appetite is quickly quenched again by the things of this world.

It is perfectly true, blessedly true, that there is no “if,” no uncertainty, from the *Divine* side in connection with the Christian’s reaching Heaven: everyone who has been justified by God shall without fail be glorified. Those who have been Divinely quickened will most assuredly continue in the faith and persevere in holiness unto the end of their earthly course. This is clear from 1 John 2:19, where the Apostle alludes to some in his day who had apostatized, “They went out from us, but they were not of us”—they belonged not to the family of God, though for awhile they had fraternized with some of its members.

“For” adds the Apostle, “if they had been of us (had they really been one in a personal experience of the regenerating power of the Spirit) they would have *continued* with us”—nothing could have induced them to heed the siren voice of their seducers. “But they went out from us that they might be made manifest that they were *not* all of us”—but merely

temporary professors, stony-ground hearers, nominal Christians, members of a totally different family. Previously they had every appearance of being the genuine article, but by their defection they were exposed as counterfeits. No, there is no “if” from the Divine side.

Nevertheless, there is an “if” from the *human* side of things, from the standpoint of our responsibility, in connection with my making sure that I am one of those whom God has promised to preserve unto His heavenly kingdom. Continuance in the faith, in the path of obedience, in denying self and following Christ, is not simply desirable but indispensable. No matter how excellent a beginning I have made, if I do not continue to press forward I shall be lost. Yes, lost, and not merely miss some particular crown or millennial honours as the deluded dispensationalists teach. It is persevere or perish: it is final perseverance or perish eternally—there is no other alternative. Romans 11:22 makes that unmistakably clear: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them that fell (the unbelieving Jews) severity: but toward thee (saved Gentiles, v. 11), goodness, IF thou *continue* in His goodness: *otherwise* thou also shalt be cut off.” The issue is plainly drawn: continuance in God’s goodness or being “cut off.” To continue in God’s goodness is the opposite of returning to our badness. The evidence that we are the recipients of God’s goodness is that we continue in the faith and obedience of the Gospel. The end cannot be reached apart from the appointed means.

But I cannot see the consistency between what has been set forth in the last two paragraphs, some will exclaim. What of it: who are you? who am I? Merely short-sighted creatures of yesterday, upon whom God has written “folly and vanity.” Shall human ignorance set itself against Divine wisdom? Does any reader dare call into question the practice of Christ and His Apostles: *they* pressed the “if” and insisted upon the needs-be for this “continuing”; and those ministers who fail to do so—no matter what their standing or reputation—are no servants of God. Can you see the consistency between the Apostle affirming so positively of those who have received the Holy Spirit from Christ “ye *shall* abide (“continue”—the same Greek word as in all the above passages) in Him,” and then in the very next breath exhorting them, “And now, little children, *abide* (“continue”) in Him” (1 John 2:27, 28)—if you cannot it must be because of theological blinkers. Can you see the consistency of David asserting so confidently, “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy O LORD, endureth forever,” and then immediately after praying, “forsake not the works of Thine own hands” (Psa. 138:8)—if you cannot then this writer places a big question-mark against your religious profession.

5. By insisting that there are *dangers to guard against*. Here again there will be those who object against the use of this term in such a connection. What sort of dangers, they will ask: dangers of the Christian’s severing his fellowship with God, losing his peace, spoiling his usefulness, rendering himself unfruitful?—granted, but not of missing Heaven itself. They will point out that safety and danger are opposites and that one who is secure in Christ cannot be in any peril of perishing. However plausible, logical, and apparently Christ-honouring that may sound, we would ask, Is *that* how Scripture represents the case? Do the Epistles picture the saints as being in no danger of apostasy? Or, to state it less baldly: are there no sins warned against, no evils denounced, no paths of unrighteousness described, which if persisted in do not certainly terminate in destruction? And is there no responsibility resting on me in connection therewith? Apostasy is not reached at a single bound, but is the final culmination of an evil process, and it is against

those things which have a tendency unto apostasy against which the saints are repeatedly and most solemnly warned.

One who is now experiencing good health is in no immediate danger of dying from tuberculosis, nevertheless if he recklessly exposes himself to the wet and cold, if he refrains from taking sufficient nourishing food which supplies strength to resist disease, or if he incurs a heavy cough on his chest and makes no effort to break it up, he is most likely to fall a victim to consumption. So while the Christian remains spiritually healthy he is in no danger of apostatizing, but if he starts to keep company with the wicked and recklessly exposes himself to temptation, if he fails to use the means of grace, if he experiences a sad fall, and repents not of it and returns to his first works, he is deliberately heading for disaster. The seed of eternal death is still in the Christian: that seed is sin, and it is only as Divine grace is diligently and constantly sought for the thwarting of its inclinations and suppressing of its activities, that it is hindered from developing to a fatal end. A small leak which is neglected will sink a ship just as effectually as the most boisterous sea. And as Spurgeon said on Psalm 19:13, "Secret sin is a stepping stone to presumptuous sin, and *that* is the vestibule of 'the sin which is unto death' " (Treasury of David).

Did no dangers menace Israel after Jehovah brought them out of Egypt with a high hand and by His mighty arm conducted them safely through the Red Sea? Did all who entered upon the journey to Canaan actually arrive at the promised land? Perhaps some one replies, *They* were under the old covenant and therefore supply no analogy to the case of Christians today. What says the Word? This, they "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:2-4). What analogy could be closer than that? Yet the passage goes on to say, "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (v. 5). And what is the use which the Apostle makes of this solemn history? Does he say that it has no application unto us? The very reverse: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted . . . neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents" (vv. 6-9). Here is a most deadly danger for us to guard against.

Nor did the Apostle leave it at that. He was still more definite, saying, "Neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the Destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come," making this specific application unto Christians, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest *he* fall" (vv. 10-12). Paul was no fatalist but one who ever enforced moral responsibility. He inculcated no mechanical salvation, but one which must be worked out "with fear and trembling." Charles Hodge of Princeton was a very strong Calvinist, yet on 1 Corinthians 10:12 he failed not to say: "There is perpetual danger of falling. No degree of progress we have already made, no amount of privileges which we may have enjoyed, can justify the want of caution. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth,' that is, who thinketh himself secure . . . neither the members of the church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness, and they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort," i.e., against the dangers menacing them.

The above is not the only instance when the Apostle made use of the case of those Israelites who perished on their way to Canaan to warn New Testament saints of *their dan-*

*ger*. After affirming that God was grieved with that generation, saying, "They do always err in their heart and they have not known (loved) My ways, so I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest," Paul added, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12, 13). We are not here warned against an imaginary peril but a real one. "Take heed" signifies watch against carelessness and sloth, be on the alert as a soldier who knows the enemy is near, lest you fall an easy prey. Those here exhorted are specifically addressed as "brethren" to intimate there are times when the best of saints need to be cautioned against the worst of evils. An "evil heart of unbelief" is a heart which dislikes the strictness of obedience and universality of holiness which God requires of us.

After referring again to those "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness" to whom God swore, "they shall not enter into My rest, because of their unbelief" or "disobedience" (3:16, 19), the Apostle said, "Let us therefore *fear* lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb. 4:1). "Fear" is as truly a Christian grace as is faith, peace or joy. The Christian is to fear temptations, the dangers which menace him, the sin which indwells him, the warnings pointed by others who have made shipwreck of the faith and the severity of God in His dealings with such. He is to fear the threats of God against sin and those who indulge themselves in it. It was because Noah was "moved with fear" at the warning he had received from God that he took precautions against the impending flood (Heb. 11:7). God has plainly announced the awful doom of all who continue in allowed sin, and fear of that doom will inspire caution and circumspection, and will preserve from carnal security and presumption. And therefore are we counselled, "passing the time of your sojourn here in *fear*" (1 Peter 1:17)—not only in exceptional seasons, but the whole of our time here.

We can barely glance at a few more of the solemn cautions addressed not merely to formal professors but to those who are recognized as genuine saints. "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). Obviously such a warning would be meaningless if the Christian were not threatened with a most deadly danger. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, *beware* lest *ye also*, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17). This warning looks back to the false prophets of (2:1, 2)—and what is said of them in verses 18-22? The "error of the wicked" here cautioned against includes both doctrinal and practical, especially the latter—forsaking of the "narrow way" the highway of holiness which alone leads to Heaven. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11)—cling tenaciously to the Truth you have received, the faith which has been planted in your heart, in the measure of grace given you.

But how do you reconcile the Christian's danger with his safety? There is nothing to reconcile, for there is no antagonism. Enemies and not friends need reconciling, and warnings are the Christian's friend, one of the safeguards which God has placed around the Truth of the security of His people, preventing them from wresting it to their destruction. By revealing the certain consequences of total apostasy Christians are thereby cautioned and kept from the same: a holy fear moves their hearts and so becomes the *means of preventing* the very evil they denounce. A lighthouse is to warn against recklessness as mariners near the coast so that they will steer away from the fatal rocks. A fence before a

precipice is not superfluous, but is designed to call to an halt those journeying in that direction. When the driver of a train sees the signals change to red he shuts off steam, thereby preserving the passengers under his care. The danger signals of Scripture to which we have called attention are heeded by the regenerate and therefore are among the very means appointed by God for the preservation of His people, for it is only by attending to the same they are kept from destroying themselves.—A.W.P.



### SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

[What follows is not designed for the careless and casual reader who hurriedly skims these pages merely to ascertain what is in them, but for refined minds that can appreciate the sublime and who will deem themselves well repaid for re-reading this piece more slowly and thoughtfully. We can say this the more freely inasmuch as it is no composition of ours—nor is our pen capable of reaching such heights—but rather that of one who wrote almost two centuries ago: James Hervey, a rector in a small parish in Northamptonshire. No one denomination can claim a monopoly of God's most faithful and eminent servants, nor have they been confined to Nonconformity. Some of His choicest ministers were bestowed upon the Church of England, as such men as Toplady, Berridge, John Newton, and a host of others since them prove.]

With immense charge and exquisite skill Solomon had erected the most rich and finished structure that the sun ever saw. Yet, upon a review of his work and a reflection on the transcendent perfections of the Godhead, how he exalts the one and abases the other! The building was too glorious for the mightiest monarch to inhabit, too sacred for unhallowed feet even to enter, yet infinitely too mean for the Deity to reside in. It was, and the royal worshipper acknowledged it to be, a most marvellous vouch-safement in uncreated excellency to "put His Name there." The whole passage breathes such a delicacy and is animated with such a sublimity of sentiment: "But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold! the Heaven and Heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have builded!" (1 Kings 8:27).

"But will"—a fine abrupt beginning, most significantly describing the amazement and rapture of the royal Prophet's mind. "*God*": he uses no epithet, where writers of inferior discernment would have multiplied them; but speaks of the Deity as an incomprehensible Being, whose perfections and glories are exalted above all praise. "Dwell"—to bestow on sinful creatures a propitious look, to favour them with a transient visit of kindness, even this were an unutterable obligation. Will He then vouchsafe to *fix* His abode among them and take up His stated residence with them? "Indeed"—a word in this connection peculiarly emphatic, expressive of a condescension, wonderful and extraordinary almost beyond all credibility. "Behold"!—intimating the continued, or rather the increasing surprise of the speaker, and awakening the attention of the hearer. "Behold! the Heaven"—the spacious concave of the firmament: that wide extended azure circumference, in which worlds unnumbered perform their revolutions, is too scanty an apartment for the Godhead. "Nay: the Heaven of heavens"—those vastly higher tracts, which lie far beyond the limits of human survey, to which our very thoughts can hardly soar; even these (unbounded as they are) cannot afford an adequate Habitation for Jehovah; even these dwindle into a point when compared with the Infinite of His Essence; even these "are as nothing before *Him*." "How much less"—proportionate is this poor diminutive speck (which I have been erecting and embellishing) to so august a Presence, so immense a Majesty!

We are apt to be struck with admiration at the stateliness and grandeur of a masterful performance in architecture. And perhaps on a sight of the ancient sanctuary should have made the superficial observation of the disciples: "What manner of stones!" and "what buildings are here!" But what a nobler turn of thought and more just plane of things does it discover to join with Israel's king in celebrating the condescension of the Divine Inhabitant! That the high and lofty One who fills immensity with His glory, should, in a

peculiar manner fix His abode there! Should there manifest an extraordinary degree of His benedictive Presence, permit sinful mortals to approach His Majesty, and promise “To make them joyful in His house of Prayer!” This should more sensibly affect our hearts than the most curious arrangement of stones can delight our eyes

Nay, the everlasting God does not disdain to dwell in *our souls* by His Holy Spirit, and to make even our *bodies* His temple! Tell me, ye that frame critical judgments and balance nicely the distinction of things, Is this most astonishing or most rejoicing? He humbleth Himself, the Scriptures assure us, ever to behold the things that are in Heaven (Psa. 113:6). ‘Tis a most condescending favour if HE pleases to take the least approving notice of angels and archangels when they bow down in homage from their celestial thrones. Will He then graciously regard, will He be united, most intimately united to poor polluted man, breathing dust?—unparalleled honour! invaluable privilege! Be *this* my portion, and I shall not covet crowns nor envy conquerors.

