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EVANGELICAL PREACHING.

Evangelical preaching is that preaching which accords with the spirit and substance of the Gospel of God. It is that preaching which is tainted neither with legality nor licentiousness: which gives full place to both the grace of God and the righteousness of God. It maintains the claims of Divine holiness without bringing the soul into bondage. It proclaims a free salvation without making light of sin. It presents a Saviour who is suited to and sufficient for the very chief of sinners, yet affirms that only those who have been brought to loathe themselves and are sick of sin will welcome such a holy Physician. It announces the glorious liberty into which the sons of God have been brought and urges them to stand fast in the same, yet it also points out that such liberty is the very reverse of being a license granted us to indulge the lusts of the flesh without fear of consequences. While denying that good works enter at all into the ground of our acceptance by God, care is taken to show that a faith which does not *produce good works* is worthless and saves no one.

Our lot is cast in a day of such spiritual darkness, ignorance and corrupting of the Truth that there is a real need for pointing out what true evangelical preaching consists of, as there is for showing what is not either legal or licentious preaching. Where real evangelism is to be found (and few are the places where it now exists) so great is the confusion in many minds that there are not a few who will charge that preacher with either legality or licentiousness. Both are items of opprobrium, the former especially being one which Satan is very fond of using for discrediting the servants of God, and once the rumour gains currency that such and such a preacher is "Legalistic," many people will shun his ministrations. Those who insist that the Moral Law is the believer's Rule of Conduct and who press the preceptive parts of Scripture are often dubbed "Legalists" and charged with bringing God's people into bondage, but such accusations are both baseless and slanderous and must not be heeded by lovers of the Truth.

One object before us in writing on our present subject is that the few Servants of God now remaining may be freed from the unjust aspersions which religious libertines are so fond of heaping upon them, and that those Christians who read this article may be more on their guard against giving ear to false accusations. Those who declare that sanctification or practical holiness is an essential part of salvation, who insist upon a godly walk as the necessary evidence of a credible profession and who faithfully warn the Lord's people that looseness of conduct and lack of strictness in their deportment will certainly sever communion with their Beloved, will be most unfairly charged with "legality." Those who lay much emphasis upon the vital importance of maintaining a conscience void of offense toward God and men, who insist upon the needs-be of the Christian's daily confessing every known sin before his Father and of making full restitution unto every fellow creature he has wronged in any way, will be unjustly charged with bringing the saints into bondage.

Not only should the reader be much on his guard against forming or entertaining any unwarrantable criticisms of a true servant of God, but he needs to be watchful lest he give ear unto any of Satan's lies against *himself*. So difficult is it to keep the scales equally poised, so easily do we fail to heed *both* sides of the Truth, that we are ever prone to lose the balance. Yet, knowing our danger here, yea, even when preserved therefrom, the great Enemy of our souls will seek to persuade us we are guilty of erring. When such a

Scripture as, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22), is before us and we perceive that a moral fitness is required in order to obtain an audience with the Majesty on high, the Devil will be ready to tell us that we are denying the sufficiency of Christ's blood to give us access—confounding our *legal title* to do so with our *experimental meetness*. When we give heed to such a word as, "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me" (Psa. 66:18), the Devil will come as an angel of light bidding us beware of entertaining the thought that God's answering of our prayers is dependent upon something good in ourselves.

Now evangelical preaching is designed to equip the Lord's people so that they can repel such assaults of the Enemy and preserve them from the two extremes to which they are prone. Evangelical preaching will expound the Everlasting Covenant which God has made with His people in Christ and show that the whole of their salvation is found therein. It will show how that Covenant is one of grace, pure and simple, free, sovereign, invincible and immutable grace—entirely independent of anything in or from the creature, either foreseen or actual. It will make clear the office and part played by each of the glorious Persons in the incomprehensible Godhead so that each One may be distinctly owned and honoured, intelligently worshipped and adored. How that God the Father made choice of those who were to be the recipients of His inestimable favour, predestinating the same unto the adoption of sons. How that God the Son agreed to become incarnate, serve as the Surety of the elect, making an atonement for their sins and providing for their everlasting righteousness. How that God the Spirit undertook to regenerate them, to sanctify them through the Truth, to work in them a saving faith which produces good works and to preserve them from apostasy and bring them into their blessed inheritance.

Evangelical preaching is careful to show how this wondrous Covenant of Grace exemplifies, secures and maintains the Divine righteousness of each point. So far from making light of sin it furnishes the climacteric demonstration of God's hatred thereof, for Jehovah exacted from the Surety full satisfaction to His broken Law and caused Him to endure the unabated curse of the same. When the Holy Spirit quickens the elect He so illumines their understandings that they perceive the infinite evil of sin. He so convicts their consciences that they are horrified at their own depravity and confess they are utterly undeserving of the least of God's mercies. He so renews their hearts that indwelling corruption becomes their greatest burden and grief. At regeneration God puts His laws into their hearts and writes them in their minds (Heb. 10:16) and so places His holy fear within them that they shall never fully or finally depart from Him (Jer. 32:40). After their regeneration the Spirit renews them day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), causing them to walk in the paths of righteousness and recovering when they stray therefrom.

Evangelical preaching places the crown of honour where it rightfully belongs: not upon the creature, but upon the head of the Lord Jesus. It makes nothing of man and everything of Christ. It ever reminds the believer that it is a sovereign God who makes him to differ from the reprobate and that he has nothing good whatever in himself save what has been communicated to him by the blessed Spirit (1 Cor. 4:7). It teaches him that "all his springs" are in the Lord (Psa. 87:7), that he must draw upon and draw from Him all that he needs, receiving out of His exhaustless "fullness, grace for grace" (John 1:16). It teaches him that Christ is his "life" (Col. 3:4), that he has no life apart from Christ, so

that he must daily live in Christ, live on Christ, live unto Christ. Said the Apostle, “Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20); and again, “for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21; and yet again, “I can do all things *through Christ* which strengtheneth me” (4:13).

At the same time evangelical preaching is careful to insist upon human responsibility and to call for the full discharge of Christian duty. It presents to view the exalted and changeless standard at which we must ever aim: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father *which is* in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). It warns us against making any excuse for failure to attain unto that standard, bidding us judge ourselves unsparingly for all failure, and to renew our efforts in pressing forward to the same. It tells us we have no strength of our own but must seek it from above, yet points out that the way to obtain more is to use what we already have (Luke 8:18). It calls the believer to a life of unreserved obedience to his Lord but insists that the motive for the same must be love and gratitude for all He suffered on his account. It faithfully declares that backsliding will bring severe chastisement upon the Christian (Psa. 89:30-32) and that if he would have the rod removed, he must forsake that which occasioned it.

Evangelical preaching avoids the snare of legality by bringing in Christ as the believer’s Object: the One to whom he owes everything, the One to whom he must apply for the supply of every need, the One to whom he is to glorify by a walk which is pleasing in His sight. Evangelical preaching lays the axe at the roots of self-righteousness by constantly reminding the believer of his continual indebtedness to Divine grace, that nothing he can do is to the least degree meritorious, and that should he fully perform his duty he is still “an unprofitable servant.” On the other hand, evangelical preaching avoids the snare of licentiousness by steadily holding up the Divine standard of “Be ye holy in all manner of conversation” or “behaviour” (1 Peter 1:15), by constantly pressing both the exhortations and warnings of Scripture, and by reminding its hearers “without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Well may every true servant of God exclaim, “Who is sufficient for these things!” (2 Cor. 2:16); and well is it when he can—humbly, dependently, but truthfully—add, “our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5).—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

22. *Seeking Grace*: Matthew 7:9-11.

Every Christian will grant that prayer is a bounden duty, that it is obligatory upon us to own our dependence upon the Giver of all good and perfect gifts, to seek from Him those things which we are in need of both temporally and spiritually, to acknowledge the Lord's goodness and lovingkindness and render thanks for His manifold mercies. To fail at such a point is inexcusable, making us like unto those who live as though there were no God, rendering not unto Him that which is His undoubted due. Prayerlessness is not to be looked upon as an innocent infirmity but as a sin of the deepest dye which is to be penitently confessed. Christians will also grant that prayer is a precious *privilege*, for by this ordinance they may obtain an audience with the Majesty on High, delight themselves in the Lord, commune with the Beloved of their souls, unburden their hearts before Him and prove Him to be "a very present help in trouble." Alas, that we prize this privilege so little and treat it so lightly!

Though it be freely allowed that prayer is a bounden duty and a precious privilege—the fact remains that many professing Christians are woefully slack in performing that duty and availing themselves of that privilege. Why is this? Let them not add to the sin of prayerlessness the wickedness of seeking to throw the blame upon God, by declaring He has withheld from them the spirit of prayer, that He refuses them liberty of approach unto Him. That were to add insult to injury. We make an evil use of it when we appeal to God's sovereignty in order to excuse ourselves from discharging our responsibilities. If we are not enjoying the light of God's countenance it is because our sins have come in between us as a thick cloud (Isa. 59:2). If we are not receiving good things at His hands it is because our iniquities have withheld them (Jer. 5:24). If our hearts are cold and prayerless it is because we have grieved the Holy Spirit. The fault is wholly ours, and we must honestly admit it.

Among the things we may mention that hinder a free and regular approach unto the Throne of Grace are *the workings of pride*. Pride begets a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency. It goes against the natural grain to take our place in the dust and come before God as empty-handed beggars. True we did so at the beginning of our Christian experience, for then we had been emptied of self and brought to look entirely outside of self for deliverance. But alas, increased years are rarely accompanied by increased humility. As we become better versed in the letter of Holy Writ and more acquainted with the mysteries of our Faith a sense of self-sufficiency is apt to possess us. "Knowledge puffs up," and the more puffed up we are the less our sense of need and the more formal and infrequent our seeking after Divine grace.

A spirit of sloth is paralyzing to our prayer life. The soul loves its ease as well as the body, that is why we are exhorted to "watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7). And how forceful that word from the pen of such an one! It was at that very point Peter had first failed. The Lord had bidden him to "watch and pray." Instead, he went to sleep. Prayer is likened unto "striving" (Rom. 15:30), "labouring fervently" (Col. 4:12) and "wrestling" (Eph. 6:12, 18), and such exertions are not possible when lethargy has overcome us. The *power of unbelief* quenches the spirit of prayer. Unbelief raises objections, is occupied with difficulties, and leaves God entirely out of its considerations. Only where faith is in healthy operation can we expect any success in this holy exercise. But flirting with the

world, yielding to the lusts of the flesh, or heeding the lies of Satan stifles the breath of faith and then the soul is left to gasp in the foul atmosphere of unbelief.

Now in that section of the Sermon on the Mount which we are now considering our Lord sets before His disciples one inducement after another to stimulate them unto prayer. First, He gives them a gracious invitation: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). Second, He assures them of an answer by giving them a sure promise: "For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (v. 8). Third, He draws an infallible inference from the Fatherhood of God: "For what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (vv. 9-11).

In order to get the full force of Christ's conclusion let us observe its premise: "If ye then, *being evil*." First of all observe how that brief sentence expresses the Divine estimate of fallen mankind. How those words abase the pride of man, affirming as they do the depravity and corruption of human nature. Philosophers and poets, preachers and politicians may prate all they please about the dignity and divinity of man, the nobility and grandeur of human nature—but they fly in the face of this solemn and inerrant verdict of the Son of God. Christ was not deceived by the fair profession and religious pretensions of those He met with, for "many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did," but "Jesus did not commit Himself unto them . . . for He knew *what was in man*" (John 2:23-25). This "if ye then, being evil" is yet more solemn and striking when we note that our Lord said it not to those who were His open enemies, but unto His own disciples (see Luke 11:1, 2, 9, 13)—by *nature* they were polluted.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children" (Luke 11:13). Notwithstanding the fact that you not only *do* that which is evil but *are* yourselves evil—the fountain itself, from whence all actions issue, being poisoned—yet you are kind to your offspring. Parental love, by the wise and gracious arrangement of God, is one of the most powerful of all the active principles of the human heart and mind. No parent worthy of the name would refuse to supply the genuine needs of his little ones when he had it in his power to do so. He would neither turn a deaf ear to their cries nor mock them by bestowing what was useless and noxious instead of that which was requisite and beneficial for them. No, despite the ruin which the Fall has entailed, men and women still respond to the instincts of affection when they perceive that their offspring are in need and use their best judgment to relieve the same—certainly those who are regenerate do so.

In what follows Christ drew a conclusion from this filial relationship: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him!" It is an argument deduced from the less to the greater, a specie of reasoning frequently met with in the Scriptures. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him" (Psa. 103:13). "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isa. 49:15). "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. 3:17). If godly parents respond to cries of need from their children, what may we expect

from Him who is supremely excellent and kindly disposed unto His children? In knowledge, in wisdom, in benevolence, in power and in resources our heavenly Father infinitely surpasses all earthly parents, and therefore we may petition Him with the fullest assurance that He will supply all our need. What conclusive reasoning is this! What persuasive appeal is here!

But let us attend next to the *connection* between this gracious and grand encouragement to seekers after Divine grace and that which immediately precedes. As we sought to point out, there is a gradation or progressive development here in our Lord's teaching on prayer—especially is this observable in Luke 11. First, there is the invitation (v. 7), and then a reassuring promise (v. 8). And now Christ disposes of an objection—a most foolish and wicked one—yet one which is nevertheless raised by some. A grave doubt is apt to arise in the distressed mind. True, God hears the petitions of His people, and as a general rule makes responses of mercy to them. But I am such an unworthy one, is He not therefore likely to be displeased at my prayers and so answer me in wrath instead of love? Certainly I should deserve it: if confessing my vileness God should judge me out of my own mouth and condemn me, what could I do? Ah, if we are afraid that God will give us something evil when we have asked Him for that which is good, then we *are* “evil” indeed.

A sense of sinfulness and the workings of unbelief cause you to fear that if you ask something good at the hands of God He will mock you with something evil—that instead of being gracious He will send you something in righteous judgment. Does the reader deem this far-fetched and suppose we are describing a very extreme and exceptional case? Then we ask, Have you never prayed about a certain matter, prayed earnestly, and the sequel has been that instead of things being improved they grew worse? Instead of relief, difficulties increased and the pressure became more acute, until you were afraid to pray any further for such a thing? Have you begged God again and again to make you more patient, and the sequel has been such that it appeared the Lord had mocked you by taking away what little patience you had? If such has not been your experience, we can assure you not a few know something like unto it.

“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?” (Matt. 7:9, 10). Here is our Lord's *refutation* of such an objection. He bids us ponder the conduct of earthly parents. Does a godly father deliberately mock his son when a reasonable request is made of him? Of course not. Then is that son afraid to come to his parent and acquaint him with his need? No, he is assured that his parent is the very one above all others who has his interests most at heart and is more likely than anyone else to minister unto him. He has confidence in his father's goodness; he trusts in his love and therefore he hesitates not to apply unto him. True, in his ignorance the child may ask for something which is harmful, and then it is the wisdom and love of his parent which withholds it; but if he asks for that which is needful and beneficial, he will not receive that which is injurious in lieu of it.

The spiritual application is obvious. As the child trusts his parent, so must you your heavenly Father. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him.” As high as God is above us so high is the certainty that He will not fail His beloved children. But to be more specific. You have perhaps been earnestly beseeching God for *guidance*, to lead you in a plain path, to make His way plain before your face.

The result has been most discouraging. Difficulties have increased, you seem more hedged in than ever, you are now at your wit's end to know what to do. Well, do not judge God harshly and conclude He has given you a stone instead of bread! Your present lot is from the Lord, your circumstances are ordered by Him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. As Spurgeon says, "It may seem hard perhaps; but may it not be the *crust* of the bread for all that? believe it to be so, but never suspect you are being treated ungenerously by your Father."

Yet it appears to us that it is not so much of temporal mercies and providential blessings as of spiritual things our passage treats. We would therefore suggest that the "bread" stands for vital and indispensable graces, and the "fish" for comforting ones. Bread is the staff of life, and the graces of repentance and faith are necessary unto salvation. Here is a soul that has prayed definitely and sincerely for repentance. But he reads that Judas repented, yet perished nevertheless. He hears some faithful servant of God draw the line between legal bondage and evangelical repentance, between the sorrow of the world and "godly sorrow which worketh repentance" (2 Cor 7:10). He is deeply concerned, wondering whether he has so renounced sin, so detested it, so loathed it from the very bottom of his heart, as to warrant his concluding that he has indeed been granted "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). He therefore applies to the Throne of Grace crying "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psa. 51:10).

So far so good; but now let us take the sequel. That individual becomes better acquainted with the plague of his own heart and in the light of God discovers corruption within such as he was not conscious of before. Nay, indwelling sin now asserts itself with increasing power and iniquities prevail. He seeks deliverance, but it comes not for the flesh remains unchanged to the end. He confesses his sins to God but so frequently that it appears to become mechanical. It seems that his heart is as hard as a stone and he is ready to believe that he was deceived—that after all he is a stranger to genuine repentance. Here, then, is the remedy for such a case. Where did you seek repentance? At the Throne of Grace, you answer. From whom, we ask; from some creature? No, you reply, from God. Then has He mocked you? If you sought simply, definitely, sincerely, from a sense of need; has He given you a stone? Perish the thought! It is Satan who seeks to persuade you that God has suffered you to be deluded. Believe not his lie.

Take *the grace of faith*. We begged God for saving faith in His Son and believed that He answered us. We renounced all our own doings and trusted in the Lord Jesus. We saw Him in the glass of the Gospel dying the Just for the unjust and we cast ourselves on His atoning sacrifice as the alone ground of our acceptance with God. But at times the question is raised in our minds, Is mine true saving faith or would it not be presumptuous for me to affirm that in Christ I am pardoned? There is an historical faith: is mine no better than that? I read that "the demons also believe" (James 2:19): may not my faith be of that sort? Do I have the genuine grace of faith or am I only deluding myself? Come back to this touchstone, my friend: where did you seek your faith? Did you ask your heavenly Father to give it you? Have you not said to Him, if my faith is worthless, graciously work in me the faith of Your elect? Then dare you conclude that instead of giving you bread He has mocked you with a stone? that instead of imparting faith by the Spirit's operation, He has put into your heart a carnal presumption and allowed you to be

deluded? Even a godly human parent would not act thus: how much less so the heavenly Father!

Take *the grace of personal piety*. You have longed for more holiness. You have asked God for more purity of heart. You have sought earnestly for a closer conformity to the image of His Son. You have knocked again and again at the Throne of Grace, beseeching that you might be sanctified wholly in spirit and soul and body. Great now is your dismay, for you find yourself more sinful than ever, indwelling corruption is increasingly active, and evil thoughts continually harass you. Even so, once more we must bring you back to this: for what did you ask? *where* did you seek this blessing? If from some pretended priests and mediators such as the poor deluded Papists have recourse to, you would indeed be deceived and disappointed. But if you sought from the great High Priest, the alone Mediator between God and men, it is impossible that He should have palmed off on you something which is evil. He *has* granted your request, though you perceive it not: the holier He makes you, the more dissatisfied you will be with yourself; the purer your heart, the more sensitive to the foulness which invades it.

Take *the grace of hope*. This is a virtue which stays the heart in seasons of distress, enabling the soul to look forward with firm expectation to better things in the future. "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24, 25). The fulfillment of the promise is not yet visible but hope causes us to wait confidently for the same. It was the grace of hope which moved Job to say, "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (23:10). The furnace might be hot, its flames most unpleasant to the flesh, the dross might sizzle (as when he cursed the day of his birth), but he had no doubt of the ultimate outcome. Ah, says the reader, I dare not cherish such an assurance: it would be presumptuous for *me* to do so. What! presumption to expect your heavenly Father to answer your prayers? presumption to expect Him to make good His promise! "He which hath begun a good work in you *will finish it*" (Phil. 1:6)! O insult Him not with such mock humility, but trust Him to act like a *Father* unto you!

It is to be observed that in Luke 11 a third thing is mentioned: "Or if he shall ask for an egg (something which only the wealthy ate in those days), will he offer him a scorpion? (v. 12). This seems to carry the thought beyond asking for necessary or even comforting graces, even for what we might term *spiritual luxuries* as faith grows and becomes bolder in seeking the highest enjoyments and enrichments of the Spirit. The application is not difficult. The mature Christian covets earnestly the best gifts. He begs that he may be drawn closer to Christ and enjoy more intimate communion with Him. And what form does the answer take? More persecution from the world, more opposition from friends, more unkind treatment from brethren which stirs up the flesh and casts down the soul. Ah, but do not add to your heavenly Father the injustice of concluding He has given you a scorpion instead of an egg: malign not His character thus. Rather charge yourself with ignorance and folly because you fail to realize that communion with Christ in this life consists largely in "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10), which is the highest honour grace confers on His followers.

In closing let us point out that if we are to enter into the comfort and assurance of our passage, faith must lay firm hold of the Fatherly character and relation of God. So long as we view Him only as the stern Judge or as the Most High sovereign we may expect little

liberty of approach or assurance of answers. There must be a childlike confidence in His Fatherly goodness and love—a believing He will give good things unto the members of His dear Family. There must be a reliance upon His sufficiency. An earthly parent may “*know how* to give good gifts unto his children,” but difficult circumstances often prevent him carrying out his desires. Not so our heavenly Father: He not only “knoweth how” but *actually gives* unto His children. Then doubt Him not and cease supposing He has substituted something worthless for genuine grace.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

30. His Ordeal.

The contents of 1 Kings 20 have presented quite a problem to most of those who have written thereon. It opens with the statement, "And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his hosts together: and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria and warred against it" (1 Kings 20:1). So confident of victory was he that he sent messengers to Ahab saying, "Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children" (v. 3). Having seen something of the accumulated and aggravated sins of Ahab we might well suppose the Lord would give success to this enterprise of Benhadad's and use him to humiliate and punish Ahab and his apostate consort. But this expectation is not realized. Strange as that appears, our surprise is greatly increased when we learn that a Prophet came unto Ahab saying, "Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude, behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD" (v. 13). In the immediate sequel we behold the fulfillment of that prediction: "The king of Israel went out and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter" (v. 21): thus the victory was not with Benhadad but with Ahab.

Nor does the above incident stand alone, for the next thing we read of is, "and the Prophet came to the king of Israel and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee" (v. 22). This seems passing strange: that the Lord should come to the help of such an one as Ahab. Again the prediction was fulfilled, for Benhadad came with such immense forces that the army of Israel appeared "like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country" (v. 27). Once more a Prophet came to Ahab saying, "Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD" (v. 28). The outcome was that "The children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day" (v. 29). But because he allowed Benhadad to go free, another Prophet announced unto Ahab, "Thy life shall go for his life" (v. 42).

God's time to destroy Ahab and all who followed him in idolatry had not yet come. It was through Hazael and not Benhadad the Divine vengeance was to be wrought. But if the hour of retribution had not then arrived, why was Benhadad permitted to thus menace the land of Samaria? Ah, it is the answer to that question which casts light upon the above problem. The "day of the Lord" is deferred because God is longsuffering to His elect, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Not until Noah and his family were safely in the ark did the windows of Heaven open and pour down their devastating flood. Not until Lot was delivered from Sodom did fire and brimstone fall upon it. "I cannot do anything (said the destroying angel) till thou be come thither" (Gen. 19:22). And so it was here: not until Elijah and his helper had completed their work, not until all the "seven thousand" whom Jehovah reserved for Himself had been called, would the work of judgment be effected.

Following upon the account of Elisha's call to the ministry the Inspired narrative supplies us with no description of the activities in which they engaged, yet we may be sure that they redeemed the time. Probably in distant parts of the land they sought to instruct the people in the worship of Jehovah, opposing the prevailing idolatry and

general corruption, labouring diligently though quietly to effect a solid reformation. It would seem that, following the example of Samuel (1 Sam. 10:5-10; 19:20), they established schools here and there for fitting young men unto the prophetic office, instructing them in the knowledge of God's Law and preparing them to become expounders of it unto the people, and also to lead in psalmody—an important service indeed. We base this view on the mention of "the sons of the Prophets that were at Bethel" and "at Jericho" (2 Kings 2:3, 5). Thus it was that Elijah and Elisha were able to proceed for a year or two unmolested in their work—for being engaged in defending himself and his kingdom from powerful enemies, Ahab was too fully occupied to interfere with them. How wondrous are God's ways!—kings and their armies are but pawns to be moved here and there as He pleases!

In what has been before us we may see the varied means the Lord employs in order to protect His servants from those who would injure them. He knows how to ward off the assaults of their enemies who would oppose them in their pious efforts to be good. He can make all things smooth and secure for them, that they may proceed without annoyance in discharging the duties which He has assigned them. The Lord can easily fill the heads and hands of their opponents with such urgent business and solicitations that they have enough to do to take care of themselves without harassing His servants in their work. When David and his men were hard pressed in the wilderness of Maon and it appeared they were doomed, "There came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines" (1 Sam. 23:27, 28). How incapable we are of determining why God permits one nation to rise up against another, against this one rather than that!

The two Prophets continued their work in preaching to the people and instructing their younger brethren for some time, and in view of the promise in 1 Kings 19:18, we may conclude the blessing of the Lord rested upon their labours, and that not a few were converted. Gladly would they have remained in this quiet and happy occupation, only too glad to escape the notice of the court. But the ministers of God are not to expect a smooth and easy life. They may be thus indulged for a brief season especially after they have been engaged in some hard and perilous service, yet they must hold themselves in constant readiness to be called forth from their tranquil employment to fresh conflicts and severer duties which will try their faith and demand all their courage. So it was now with Elijah. A fresh trial awaited him, a real ordeal, nothing less than being required to confront Ahab again, and this time pronounce his doom. But before considering the same we must look at that which occasioned it.

"And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (1 Kings 21:4). The reference is unto Ahab. Here lay the king of Israel in a room of the palace in a fit of dejection. What had occasioned it? Had some invader overcome his army? No, his soldiers were still flush with victory over the Syrians. Had his false prophets suffered another massacre? No, the worship of Baal had now recovered from the terrible disaster of Carmel. Had his royal consort been smitten down by the hand of death? No, Jezebel was still very much alive, about to lead him into further evil. What, then had brought about his melancholy? The context tells us. Adjoining the royal residence was a vineyard owned by one of its subjects. A whim suddenly possessed the king that this vineyard must become his so that it might be made an attractive extension

to his own property and he was determined to obtain it at all costs. The wealthy are not satisfied with their possessions but are constantly lusting after more.

Ahab approached Naboth the owner of this vineyard and offered to give him a better one for it or to purchase it for cash. Apparently that was a very innocent proposal—in reality it was a subtle temptation. “The land shall not be sold forever (outright), for the land is Mine” (Lev. 25:23). “So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for everyone of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers” (Num. 36:7). Thus it lay not within the lawful power of Naboth to dispose of his vineyard. But for that there could have been no harm in meeting the equitable offer of Ahab—nay, it had been discourteous, even churlish, to refuse his sovereign. But however desirous Naboth might be of granting the king’s request he could not do so without violating the Divine Law which expressly forbade a man’s alienating any part of the family inheritance. Thus a very real and severe test was now presented to Naboth: he had to choose between pleasing the king and displeasing the King of kings.

There are times when the believer may be forced to choose between compliance with human law and obedience to the Divine Law. The three Hebrews were faced with that alternative when it was demanded that they should bow down and worship before an image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:14, 15). Peter and John were confronted with a similar situation when the Sanhedrin forbade them preaching any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). When the government orders any of God’s children to work seven days in the factories, they are being asked to disobey the Divine statute, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” While rendering to Caesar the things which Caesar may justly require, under no circumstances must we fail to render unto God those which He demands of us, and if we should be bidden to rob God, our duty is plain and clear: the inferior law must yield to the higher—loyalty to God takes precedence over all other considerations. The examples of the three Hebrews and the Apostles leave no room for doubt on the point. How thankful we should be that the laws of our country so rarely conflict with the Law of God.

“And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee” (1 Kings 21:3). He started back with horror from such a proposal, looking upon it with alarm as a temptation to commit a horrible sin. Naboth took his stand on the written Word of God and refused to act contrary thereto, even when solicited to do so by the king himself. He was one of the seven thousand whom the Lord had reserved unto Himself, a member of the “remnant according to the election of grace.” Hereby do such identify themselves, standing out from the compromisers and temporizers. A “Thus saith the LORD” is final with them: neither monetary inducements nor threats of punishment can move them to disregard it. “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Acts 4:19) is their defense when brow beaten by the powers that be. Settle it in your mind, my reader, it is no sin, no wrong, to defy human authorities if they should require of you anything which manifestly clashes with the Law of the Lord. On the other hand, the Christian should be a pattern to others of a law-abiding citizen, so long as God’s claims upon him is not infringed.

Ahab was greatly displeased by Naboth’s refusal, for in the thwarting of his desire his pride was wounded, and so vexed was he to meet with this denial that he sulked like a spoilt child when its will is crossed. The king so took to heart his disappointment that he

became miserable, took to his bed and refused nourishment. What a picture of the poor rich? Millionaires and those in high office are not to be envied, for neither material wealth nor worldly honours can bring contentment to the heart. Solomon proved that: he was permitted to possess everything the natural man craved, and then found it all to be nothing but “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Is there not a solemn warning here for each of us? How we need to heed that word, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Coveting is being dissatisfied with the portion God has given me and lusting after something which belongs to my neighbour. Inordinate desires always lead to vexation, unfitting us to enjoy what is ours.

“But Jezebel his wife came to him and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money, or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard” (1 Kings 21:5, 6). How easy it is to misrepresent the most upright. Ahab made no mention of Naboth’s conscientious grievance for not complying with his request, but speaks of him as though he had acted only with insubordination and obstinacy. On hearing that statement Jezebel at once revealed her awful character: “Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth” (v. 7). As Matthew Henry expressed it, “Under pretence of comforting her afflicted husband, she fed his pride and passion, blowing the coals of his corruption.” She sympathized with his unlawful desire, strengthened his feeling of disappointment, tempted him to exercise an arbitrary power and urged him to disregard the rights of another and defy the Law of God. Are you going to allow a subject to balk you? Be not so squeamish: use your royal power: instead of grieving over a repulse, revenge it.

The most diabolical stratagem was now planned by this infamous woman in order to wrest the inheritance of Naboth from himself. First, she resorted to forgery, for we are told, “she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth” (v. 8). Second, she was guilty of deliberate hypocrisy. “Proclaim a fast” (v. 9), so as to convey the impression that some horrible wickedness had been discovered, threatening the city with Divine judgment unless the crime were expiated—history contains ample proof that the vilest crimes have often been perpetrated under the cloak of religion. Third, she drew not the line at out-and-out perjury, suborning men to testify falsely: “Set Naboth on high among the people (under colour of giving him a fair trial by legal prosecution), and set two men, sons of Belial, before him saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king” (v. 9, 10)—thus even in “the place of judgment wickedness was there” (Eccl. 3:16).

Here was a woman who sowed sin with both hands. She not only led Ahab deeper into iniquity, she dragged the elders and nobles of the city into the mire of her Devil-inspired crime. She made the sons of Belial, the false witnesses, even worse than they were before. She became both a robber and a murderess, filching Naboth both of his good name and heritage. The elders and nobles of Israel were base enough to carry out her orders—sure sign was this that the kingdom was ripe for judgment—when those in high places are Godless and conscienceless it will not be long ere the wrath of the Lord falls on those over whom they preside. At the instigation of those nobles and elders

Naboth was “carried forth out of the city and stoned with stones that he died” (1 Kings 21:13)—his sons also suffering a similar fate (2 Kings 9:26) that the entail might be cut off.

Let it be well attended to that this unprincipled woman, so full of limitless ambition and lust of power, is not only a historical personage, but the predictive symbol of a nefarious and apostate system. The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 supply a prophetic outline of the history of Christendom. That of Thyria, which portrays Romanism, makes mention of “that woman Jezebel” (2:20) and striking are the parallels between this queen and the monstrous system which has its headquarters at the Vatican. Jezebel was not a Jewess, but a heathen princess, and Romanism is not a product of Christianity but of paganism. Scholars tell us her name has a double meaning (according to its Zidonian and Hebrew significations): “a chaste virgin”—which is what Rome professes to be: and “a dunghill”—what Rome is in God’s sight. She reigned in power as Israel’s queen, Ahab being merely her tool: kings are the puppets of Rome. She set up an idolatrous priesthood. She slew the Lord’s servants. She employed dishonest and fiendish methods to obtain her ends. She met with a terrible end.

As Jezebel was a prophetic symbol of that Satanic system known as the Papacy, Naboth was a blessed type of the Lord Jesus. First, he possessed a vineyard: as did Christ (Matt. 23:33). Second, as Naboth’s vineyard was desired by one who had no respect for God’s Law, so was Christ’s (Matt. 21:38). Third, each was tempted to disobey God and part with his inheritance (Matt. 4:9). Fourth, each refused to heed the voice of the Tempter. Fifth, each was falsely accused by those who sought his death. Sixth, each was charged with “blaspheming God and the king” (Matt. 26:65; Luke 23:1, 2). Seventh, each was put to death by violent hands. Eighth, each was slain “outside” the city (Heb. 13:12-14). Ninth, the murderers of each were charged with their crime (1 Kings 21:19; Acts 2:22, 23). Tenth, the murderers of each were destroyed by Divine judgment (1 Kings 21:19-23; Matt. 21:41, 22:7).

“And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it” (1 Kings 21:15-16). Jezebel was permitted to carry out her vile scheme and Ahab to acquire the coveted vineyard. By his action he testified his approval of all that had been done, and thus became sharer of its guilt. There is a class of people who refuse to personally commit crime, yet scruple not to use their employees and hired agents to do so and then take advantage of their villainies to enrich themselves. Let such conscienceless rascals and all who consider themselves shrewd in sharing unrighteous gains know that in God’s sight they are partakers of the sins of those who did the dirty work for them and will yet be punished accordingly. Many another since the days of Ahab and Jezebel have been allowed to reach the goal of their lusts even at the price of fraud, lying, dishonesty and cruel bloodshed. But in due course each shall discover that “The triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment” (Job 20:5).

Meanwhile the Lord God had been a silent Spectator of the whole transaction with respect to Naboth. He knew its atrocity, however disguised by the impious semblance of religion and law. As He is infinitely superior to kings and dictators, so He is qualified to

call them to account; and as He is infinitely righteous, He will execute judgment upon them without respect to persons. Scarcely had that horrible crime been committed than Ahab is reckoned with. "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise go down to meet Ahab king of Israel which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine" (1 Kings 21:17-19). Here was the Prophet's ordeal: to come to the king, charge him with his wickedness, and denounce sentence upon him in God's name.—A.W.P.

DOCTRINE OF SAINTS' PERSEVERANCE.

3. *Its Nature.*

We turn now to the positive side: having dwelt upon what is *not* signified or implied by the final perseverance of the saints, let us now endeavour to show whereof it consists. And here it should be duly noted that the Holy Spirit has not restricted Himself to a single expression but has used a great variety of words to describe this duty and blessing. In matters of great spiritual importance God has employed many different terms in His Word for the instruction, comfort and support of His people. Out of the scores which set forth the believer's perseverance we may cite these. It is to "continue following the LORD our God" (1 Sam. 12:14). It is to walk "in the paths of righteousness" (Psa. 23:3), to be "steadfast in the Covenant" (Psa. 78:37), to "endure unto the end" (Matt. 24:13). It is to "deny self and take up the cross daily" (Luke 9:23), to "abide" in Christ (John 15:4), to "cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). It is to "press toward the mark" (Phil. 3:14), to "continue in the faith grounded and settled" (Col. 1:23), to "hold faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:19), to "hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). It is to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1), to "stablish our hearts" (James 5:8), to "be faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10).

In the limited space at our disposal it is advisable to epitomize the main branches of this subject under a few heads. 1. Spiritual perseverance is the *maintaining of a holy profession* or a continuance in the Word and Doctrine of Christ. Wherever saving faith is imparted the soul receives the Scriptures as Divine revelation, as the very Word of God. Faith is the visive faculty of the heart by which the majesty and excellency of the Truth is perceived and by which such conviction and certainty is conveyed that the soul *knows* it is none other than the living God speaking to him. Faith "hath received His testimony" and thereby "hath set to his seal that God is true" (John 3:33). Henceforth he takes his stand on the impregnable rock of Holy Writ and neither man nor Devil can move him therefrom: "the voice of a stranger he will not follow" (John 10:5). While one who is *not* regenerated may intellectually believe and verbally profess his faith in the whole of revealed Truth, yet no regenerate person will repudiate the same.

"Some shall depart from the Faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). How many have done so within the memory of our older readers! Those who were looked upon as towers of orthodox succumbed to "evolutionism" and the "higher criticism." Those who were regarded as staunch Protestants became ensnared by Romanism. Multitudes of the rank and file who were once members of evangelical churches and teachers in the Sunday Schools have been poisoned by infidelity and repudiated their former beliefs. But all such cases were merely the chaff being separated from the wheat—thereby causing the true to stand out more plainly from the false. "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest" (1 Cor. 11:19). When many of Christ's disciples went back and walked no more with Him the Apostles were *not shaken*, for when He asked, "Will ye also go away?" their spokesman answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:66, 68).

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye *continue* in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). That is one of the marks of those who are disciples of Christ in reality and not only in appearance. They are all "taught of the LORD" (Isa. 54:13) and not merely by men, and "I know that whatsoever God doeth it

shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). False Christs and false prophets may seek to beguile them but it is not possible to deceive the elect (Matt. 24:24). Hymeneus and Philetus may err concerning the Truth, even denying the resurrection, and in consequence "overthrow the faith of some," yet we are at once assured, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seat, the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:17-19)—none with a saving faith can be overthrown. And why? Because they are enabled to continue in God's Word. Uninfluenced by "current opinion" or "modern thought," the child of God, even though the last one left on earth, would "hold fast the profession of faith without wavering" (Heb. 10:23).

2. *The maintaining of holy affections and principles.* It should be clearly understood that perseverance is not a distinct and particular grace, separate from all others—rather is it a virtue which crowns all virtues, a grace which sets a glory on every other grace. The first stirrings of the new life are seen in conviction of sin and contrition for the same, yet repentance is not an act to be performed once and for all, but a grace to be exercised constantly. Faith is that which lays hold of Christ and obtains from Him pardon and cleansing—but so far from that being something which needs not to be repeated, it is an experience which requires to be renewed day by day. The same holds good of love, of hope, of zeal. Perseverance is the continued exercise of holy affections and principles so that we do not merely trust for a while, love for a while, obey for a while and then cease; but forgetting those things which are behind we press forward to those before. "These all died in faith" (Heb. 11:13)—they not only lived by faith, but they continued doing so to the very end of their earthly pilgrimage.

"Blessed are they that mourn" (Matt. 5:4). Mark well the tense: not they that mourned in the past, but who still do so. Even Pharaoh and Ahab, yea, Judas also, had transient qualms of conscience that were nothing more than the stirrings of nature. But the child of God has within him a deeper principle, a principle of holiness which is contrary to evil, and this makes its possessor grieve over his sinfulness. "Blessed are they which *do* hunger and thirst after righteousness": not only who once hungered after righteousness, but who long ardently for it *now*. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation" (James 1:12): how much theology is to be found in the grammar of Scripture! "To whom *coming* as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, precious" (1 Peter 2:4): yes "coming" for fresh supplies of grace, for further counsel and instruction, for heart-reviving communion. "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15): they upon whom the benediction of God rests are not those who once ran well, but whose graces *continue* in exercise.

Christians are "kept by the power of God *through faith* unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). God does not preserve His people by the mere putting forth of physical power, but by renewing their graces, particularly their faith. It is through their *continued* reliance upon Christ, their trusting in the Divine promises and on God's perfections and His promise to fulfill them, their keeping of His commands and their overcoming the world (1 John 5:4) that the saints are secured from fatality. And their faith is maintained by Christ's constant intercession—"I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not"—and God's response thereto, who fulfills "all the good pleasure of His goodness in them and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess. 1:11). This does *not* mean that the Christian's faith continues in unabated exercise all his days, for as the most

fruitful tree passes through a wintertime of non-bearing so it often is in the experience of the believer—yet as the life is still in the tree though leafless, so faith remains and bursts forth afresh. “Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief” expresses his general course.

3. *The maintaining of holy conduct or good works.* When a person’s understanding has been supernaturally enlightened and his affections Divinely renewed there cannot but follow a radical change of conduct, though this is made more prominent and radical in some cases than in others. The difference is much more apparent in one who was thoroughly irreligious and guilty of gross outward sins before his new birth than another who was regulated by the training of pious parents and preserved from debauchery. Yet even with the latter a “new creation” must express itself in a new life: the Word will be read and meditated upon not so much as a duty but a delight. Prayer will be engaged in not perfunctorily but heartily—the Lord’s people will not only be respected but loved for whatever of Christ may be seen in them. Honesty and truthfulness will mark his dealings with his fellows not only because this is right but because he would not grieve the Spirit. Daily work is performed not as an irksome task which must be done but as a service gladly rendered unto Him whose Providence has wisely and graciously ordered his lot.

At regeneration God imparts spiritual life to the soul, and all life is followed by motion and operation. Before the new birth the soul was spiritually dead, and at the new birth it was entirely passive, being wrought upon by God. But after the new birth the soul becomes active. Perseverance, then, is the endeavours of the soul to concur with God’s quickening of it. Hence it is that the Christian life is often described under the figure of walking: “for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The motions of the body are transferred to the soul which by faith and love is conducted along the way of God’s statutes (Ezek. 36:27). Walking is a *voluntary* action and the renewed soul has pleasure in the path of godliness. Walking is a steady and *continuous* action, and not a spasmodic and irregular one: so the Christian pursues an obedient course not by fits and starts but steadily and steadfastly. Walking is a *progressive* motion, moving onwards to a goal: so the Christian normally goes on “from strength to strength” (Psa. 84:7). Walking as such is *incessant* for it ceases as soon as we sit down by the wayside: so the Christian life is a walking to the very end of his pilgrimage and until Heaven is reached perfect rest is not entered into.

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21). It is by such exhortations that the Christian is stirred to use the means that make for constancy. Care has to be taken if there is to be spiritual growth. It is not sufficient to be established in the faith, we must daily increase therein: the foundation is laid that a house may be erected thereon, and that is built steadily, bit by bit. For this prayer is required: this is the channel through which health and strength are obtained. Neglect of prayer is followed by arrested growth, nay, by decay of graces, for if we go not forward we backslide. To pray aright the assistance of the Holy Spirit has to be sought. Further, we must keep ourselves in God’s love by avoiding everything which displeases Him and by maintaining close and regular communion with Him. Should we leave our first love, we must repent and do the first work, (Rev. 2:4). Finally, hope must be kept in exercise: the heart fixed upon the glorious prospect and consummation awaiting us.

4. Such maintaining of a holy profession, holy affections and holy action *is necessary in order to salvation*. The very term “salvation” clearly implies danger, and of none can it be said that they are completely safe until they are completely delivered from danger. Certainly the Christian is not so while sin remains in him and he is left in a wicked world and exposed to the assaults of the Evil One. “See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven” (Heb. 12:25). Multitudes of those who came out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, fed on the manna and drank of the water from the smitten rock, afterward perished in the wilderness and we are told, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition . . . wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:10, 11), for a holy God will no more be mocked now than He would be then.

As we have pointed out, 1 Peter 1:5 places salvation in *the future*—as also does Romans 13:11; 1 Timothy 4:16—unto which the saints are kept by the power of God through faith. Heaven can only be reached by continuing along the sole path that leads there, namely, the “Narrow Way.” Those who persevere not in faith and holiness, love and obedience, will assuredly perish. Whatever temporal faith, natural love, goodly attainments, and confident assurance may appear for a while, they are a bed shorter than a man can stretch himself upon and a covering narrower than the soul can wrap itself in (Isa. 28:20). Many false prophets shall arise and shall deceive *many* and because iniquity shall abound the love of *many* shall (not merely wane or cool off, but) wax cold. “But *he* that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13). All temptations to deny the Faith, to forsake Christ, to go back into the world, to give free rein to the lusts of the flesh must be resisted to our last breath or our *profession* will prove *worthless*.

5. *Enablement for this perseverance is wrought in the saints by God*. Their deliverance from a total and final falling away is not owing to any power or sufficiency in themselves. Though their moral agency is not impaired and though continuance in well-doing is required of them, yet their enduring unto the end is not to be attributed unto their fidelity nor to the strength of the new nature which they received at regeneration. No, Christian perseverance depends wholly and entirely on the will and fidelity, the influence and energy of God working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure, making them perfect in every good work to do His will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:21). It is God, who having begun a good work in them, will carry it on “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). “If the Holy Spirit were taken from the believer, and he left to himself to stand or fall, he would immediately cease to be a believer and fall totally from a state of grace” (S. Hopkins).

Freely will any renewed person subscribe to the following lines—

“If ever it should come to pass
That any sheep of Christ should fall away,
My feeble, fickle soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day;
Were not Thy love as firm as free,
Thou soon wd’st take it Lord, from me.”

6. Christian perseverance *is consistent with being sanctified but in part*. It is most important that this is clearly stated, lest the Lord’s people conclude they are outside the

pale of the Covenant. At the new birth a holy principle or nature is imparted to them, but the old and sinful nature is not eradicated, nor is it to the slightest degree improved. Indwelling corruptions are as much opposed to God as they were before conversion, and just as active. Pray against them as he may, strive against them as he will, yet the believer is constantly overcome by them: frequently does he have to exclaim with David, "iniquities prevail against me" (Psa. 65:3). The experience described in Romans 7:14-25 is that of every genuine Christian. God gives no man such a measure of grace in this life as to make him sinless. "In many things we all offend" (James 3:2), and by sudden surprises and under great temptations believers may fall into particular gross outward acts of sin, yet, by God's grace they will not become totally corrupt and sinful as the unregenerate are, nor do they sin with their whole heart. Christian sanctification, then, is the maintaining of holy affections and actions in the midst of native depravity and all its out-flows. Despite great discouragements their faith and grace never wholly fail. Sanctified but in part now, glorified in the future.

7. From all that has been before us it will thus be seen that perseverance can be predicated only of those who "*know the grace of God in truth*" (Col. 1:6), who experience its supernatural operations in their own souls. Not a suppositional grace which may be held in reckless abandonment, but a *spiritual* grace which causes its possessor to walk cautiously. What Scripture teaches is that there never was, never will be, and never *can* be such a thing as the total and final falling away of one who has really repented and trusted on Christ. That in every instance where a Divine miracle of grace has been wrought that soul shall stand when this world and all its works shall be burned up. Rightly has it been said, "The question of the perpetuity of grace is the question of a genuine Gospel. Is grace permanent, then the Gospel is a reality. Is grace temporary, then the Gospel is a will o' the wisp, a phantom benediction—it is nothing more than a dream of blessedness from which one may awake to find himself bereft of all that raptured him" (G. S. Bishop).—A.W.P.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

VI. Its Justice

It is at *this* point that the loudest outcries are made against the truth we are here engaged with. To the natural man it appears there is such an enormous disparity between the offense and its retribution that he deems the Divine Judge to be guilty of unrighteousness—as if the guilty criminal is the one best qualified to determine the fairness or unfairness of his sentence. What, he asks, can a human being do within the short span of his earthly existence which calls for endless sufferings as its recompense?—as though the criminality of actions is to be measured by the length of time it takes to commit them! What proportion is there, he objects, between a whole lifetime of sinning, where that life is measured by a few brief years and *eternal* punishment? It has ever been thus. In the days of Ezekiel Israel complained, “The way of the Lord is not equal” (18:25). If, then, men have murmured at the equity of God’s *temporal* judgments we need not be surprised at their challenging the justice of His *eternal* judgment.

So long as the heart of fallen man remains in love with sin, while there is within him an inveterate hatred of the Holy One, until his mind ceases to be blinded by Satan it is impossible for him to view sin and its punishment in their true perspective. Not until a miracle of grace has been wrought upon him, not until he is made a new creature in Christ Jesus, is he capable of perceiving the “due reward” of his iniquities. Only when his sin-blinded eyes are opened, when spiritual vision is vouchsafed him, in those moments when in God’s light he is enabled to “see light” can he in any measure discern the righteousness of God’s claims upon him and the infinite enormity of failing to meet those claims. Only then does he begin to apprehend the ineffable holiness of the One with whom he has to do, the immeasurable “sinfulness of sin” and the illimitable extent of its ill deserts.

Above we have said that only “in those moments” when the regenerated soul is permitted to “see light” in God’s light is he enabled to perceive the “due reward” of his iniquities, for even the vision of the believer is blurred as soon as communion with God is severed, yea, at best he sees now “through a glass darkly”—in comparison with the vision which will be his in the glorified state. Much of the time even the Christian perceives not the exceeding sinfulness of sin (constituting as it does so large a part of himself) and in proportion to that failure he is incapable of discerning the equity of Divine retribution and is disposed to feel that God acts with undue severity both toward himself and with his fellows. It is useless to deny this, for it is a fact of which every renewed heart is conscious and is made to mourn because of its opposition to the Divine government. Let us illustrate what we have in mind by two examples taken from Holy Writ.

When the sacred ark was being brought home from the land of the Philistines, the oxen stumbled and the ark shook and Uzzah put forth his hand to steady it—when he at once fell to the ground a mangled corpse, smitten by the hand of God (2 Sam. 6:7). Was not Uzzah actuated by an excellent motive? He could not bear to see the sacred ark fall into the mire. And is not the reader stunned, staggered, as he learns of the terrible retribution which overtook such an apparently trivial offense? Take again the “man of God” who so fearlessly rebuked Jeroboam for his idolatry and so faithfully delivered the Divine message to him. The king was so moved that he invited him to go home with him

and refresh himself but he refused because that was contrary to the orders of God. Later, he encountered an old Prophet in Bethel who assured him that the Lord had bidden him to eat and drink in his house. Deceived, the man of God did so and immediately after a lion met him by the way and slew him for his disobedience (1 Kings 13:24).

Though the Christian is fully assured that the Judge of all the earth can do no wrong, yet such incidents as the above are apt to perplex him, for unless he is able to view them in God's light he is at a loss to discover how the punishment fits the crime. Ah, my reader, that is because we fail to perceive that Jehovah sees not as man sees. God recognizes the evil to which we are blind. God never exaggerates our sins but looks upon them as they actually are, as the "abominable thing" which He hates (Jer. 44:4). Equally strange may it appear to us that the entire human race would be ruined by a single act of our first parents. If so, it is because we see not what a black, vile, abominable thing SIN is. The least sin of thought or imagination is so heinous that God would be perfectly just if He banished us to Hell the moment we gave place to the same. Sin is an immeasurable evil. If the mere act of touching the ark brought death upon Uzzah then what a desperate evil sin must be!

Had the entire human race been sent into hopeless perdition no slur had been cast upon the Divine character, no breach made in the integrity of the Divine government, no wrong inflicted upon the creature. The fact is that we are utterly incapable of measuring the contrariety and opposition there is in sin unto Divine holiness. God alone knows what is the real demerit and desert of sin. We seek not to convince the objector of these things but to establish the believer in them. First, then, let it be pointed out that God's will is the rule of all righteousness and therefore whatsoever He does is righteous. God is answerable to none, gives no account of His matters and is not to be measured by any human standard. Where reason fails us faith must hold fast to the Divine perfections.

Second, there is a principle of evil in the sinner which eternally tends to sin and therefore it is but just for God to punish the sinner eternally: the duration of the punishment corresponds with the disposition of the delinquent. If the sinner were permitted to live on this earth forever he would dishonour God forever, transgress His Law forever, despise Christ forever, do despite to the Spirit of Grace forever. How just, then, that God should punish the sinner forever. Sinners sin as long as they can and did not His grace put a stop to their lusts, their hearts would never put a stop to them. The sinner's will to sin is everlasting, how just then that his punishment should be so. The torments of Hell will produce in them no change for the better, and as their impenitency is endless so is their doom. Therefore does God say, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still, and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22:11).

Third, sin entails infinite guilt. God is infinitely worthy of love, honour and obedience and therefore our obligation to render the same unto Him is infinite. Since God is infinitely glorious our obligation to avoid the least sin against Him is infinitely great. Consequently it necessarily follows that the evil of sin is infinite and therefore it deserves infinite punishment and the very perfections of God require that it should have its due reward. Since there is in sin an infinite evil, it is meet that God should infinitely hate sin and be the infinite enemy of it and that the expression of that hatred should be suited to His character. Penalty is levied according to the dignity of the person wronged: to strike a common person is an offense—to strike the king is far more heinous—but to rise up in rebellion against the King of kings incurs infinite guilt and punishment. Since the

creature cannot bear an infinite punishment intensively, he must bear it extensively: that is to say, by suffering it eternally.

Fourth, the wicked will only experience that which they personally chose. While they lived on earth the means of grace were available and those means set before them. Heaven and Hell, glory and misery, eternal life and eternal death as inevitable alternatives. If they chose the latter in preference to the former, they have only themselves to blame. If they preferred “the pleasures of sin for a season” rather than those “pleasures which are at God’s right hand forever more,” they can only now curse themselves for their folly. An all-sufficient Saviour is set before them in the Gospel but they declared, “we will not have this Man to rule over us.” Having despised the riches of Divine grace it is but equitable they should suffer the severities of Divine justice. When the Lord expostulated with them they answered, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways” (Job 21:14). How equitable, then, that He should yet say to them, “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire.”

How just it is that the wicked should suffer in the same everlasting fire which God had prepared for the Devil and his angels. Every descendant of Adam does by his actions and his continuance in sin justify Satan in his rebellion against the Lord God. Therefore it is most equitable that those who die impenitent should be confined with him in the same prison and be tormented under the same expression of Divine wrath. Sin is a cursed work for it is nothing less than enmity against the Divine government and it is this which rendered Satan and which renders his subjects accursed. For the curse of God to seize such is most righteous, nor do the demons call this into question (Matt. 8:29). And how meet it is that the sinner should suffer physical torment as well as mental anguish. When his body is put into the grave he has not done with it forever: it shall be raised “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2), for as it was partner with the soul in sin, so it shall be sharer with the soul in punishment.

VII. Its Aggravation.

Man enters this world a sinner (Psa. 51:5), yea, a cursed sinner (Rom. 5:18), for we are all “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3); nevertheless he is born under a government of mercy and a way of escape is set before him in the Gospel. Christ is freely offered to men and if the very chief of sinners surrenders to His sceptre and trusts in His atoning blood there is deliverance for him: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of *all* acceptation: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*” (1 Tim. 1:15). O the marvel of Divine grace: that God should make overtures of peace unto His enemies and send His own Son here to die for the ungodly! How much greater, then, must be the guilt of those who despise and reject Christ: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). As an added condemnation is incurred, so a severer punishment is ensured: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shall be brought down to Hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee” (Matt. 11:23, 24).

A Shelter is provided against the coming storm, a Hiding-place better than of caves and rocks (Rev. 6:15), a City of Refuge where there is perfect shelter from the sword of the Avenger—but woe be unto those who scorn that provision of mercy. “He that

despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing?" (Heb. 10:28, 29). As there will be degrees of honour and bliss in Heaven—some vessels of mercy having a larger capacity than others—so there will be degrees of torment in Hell: "That servant, which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few" (Luke 12:47, 48). Far worse shall it be for those in Christendom who die impenitent than for those in the darkness of heathendom. According to the talents bestowed, the opportunities afforded, the light vouchsafed, privileges enjoyed, so is our responsibility. And in proportion to our neglect of such blessings so is our criminality and the measure of our criminality will determine the degree of our torment.

From what has been before us we may perceive. 1. *The pressing duty of the preacher.* He is required to proclaim not only the blessings of the Law but its curses also and to set forth the inevitable alternatives attending our response to the Gospel—salvation to those who believe it—damnation to those who believe it not. It is his business to cry Fire! fire! escape for your lives! If to spare his own feelings or in order to be popular with his hearers he remains silent about eternal punishment, God will yet require their blood at his hands. "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke; then a great ransom cannot deliver thee" (Job 36:18): that summarizes his message to the unsaved. The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to, "Flee from the wrath to come" (Luke 3:7). The Saviour Himself bade men, "fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Matt. 10:28). His Apostles were actuated by this solemn motive: "knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). If I see my neighbour's house smoking shall I not rush in and warn him? and shall not the watchmen of Zion sound the alarm as men go heedlessly unto the everlasting fire?!

2. *The vileness of sin.* This is something which the present generation has no conception of. Crime is committed without compunction and when detected is dealt with leniently. Lying, theft, drunkenness, immorality have become so common that they are no longer regarded with abhorrence. If wrong-doing between man and man is looked upon with such tolerance and penalized so lightly, then sin against God is scarcely thought of at all. God is not a solemn reality today: if He is believed in at all He is considered as a kind and indulgent Being who is far too loving and merciful to deal severely with His erring creatures. O what a rude awakening is in store in the Day to come! My reader, form not your estimate of sin from the common sentiments prevailing among your deluded fellows: measure it rather by the fearful threats of the Almighty: ponder it in the light of eternal punishment. The wrath of God is no vain scarecrow as you will yet discover unless you fly to Christ for refuge.

3. *The state of the world.* This world which lies in the Wicked One is a vast madhouse. Who but those who are bereft of their senses will sport on the edge of a precipice where but a single step divides them from a horrible and painful death? Yet that is precisely the case with the masses all around us: bent only on pleasure, with the Bottomless Pit waiting to receive them! Mental derangement is but a shadow of the spiritual insanity which possesses the souls of the unregenerate. What a solemn word is that of the prodigal in the far country: "When he came to himself" (Luke 15:17)—

previously he was beside himself. See yon poor lunatic with a wreath of straw on his head and stick in his hand proclaiming himself a king: equally crazy are they who seek satisfaction in the honours and riches of earth. Mad, indeed, are they who live as those without a soul, who think not about eternity, who crave only to eat, drink and be merry—while the fires of Hell are being kindled for them!

4. *The value of the Gospel.* The darker the night the more welcome the stars. The more desperate the disease the more desirable a competent physician. The graver the danger the more appreciated a deliverer. It is upon the ink-black background of sin that the glories of Heaven's evangel shine forth. It heralds a Divine Redeemer who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), to deliver Hell-deserving and Hell-bound sinners. It assures those who submit to its terms, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). As water to the parched, as a lifeboat to drowning seamen, the Gospel makes known an all-sufficient Saviour to the vilest creature on earth if he will throw down the weapons of rebellion and be reconciled to a holy God. The blood of Christ can cleanse the foulest—put your trust in that Fountain which has been "opened for sin and for uncleanness" and you shall prove its saving efficacy.

5. *The need of redeeming the time.* Delay is the height of folly when nothing but the frail thread of life prevents your dropping into Hell. That thread may snap at any moment, and then you are lost forever. "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart." O you who are so headstrong, whose will is so obstinate, whose passions so desperate, know you not that you are preparing to dwell eternally in that place where peace and happiness are total strangers? You who are determined to have your fill of pleasure are but filling up the measure of your iniquities and preparing with all diligence to be fit companions with Satan in everlasting woe. Those who are now burning in their lusts shall soon burn in the Lake of Fire unless they repent and seek God's pardoning grace. Then seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. The damned are now bewailing the opportunities *they* neglected!

6. *The call to self-examination.* The Puritan Thomas Brookes states that in his day, "Some devout people caused the words 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' (Isa. 33:14) to be written in letters of gold over their chimney pieces." Well may each of us solemnly and seriously inquire, Shall *I* be among that Eternally doomed company? It is the part of wisdom to make sure of the foundation upon which our hope of deliverance rests. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12). Self-deception is perilously easy, for we are ever ready to give ourselves the benefit of any doubt. Something more than outward religion is needed. Have I renounced my own righteousness as filthy rags? Am I trusting in Christ? Do I hate sin? Is inward depravity my greatest grief and burden? Am I daily seeking grace to deny self, mortify my lust, and please God?

7. *The praise due unto God from His people.* If I am a brand which has been plucked from the burning, what thanksgiving is due unto the Lord! If my blind eyes have been opened, if my hard heart has been softened, if my stubborn will has been broken, how deeply indebted am I unto *sovereign grace*! If I have been brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvellous light, made to see and mourn my waywardness and sinfulness and had placed within me a new principle or nature which causes me to hunger

and thirst after righteousness and pant for communion with and conformity to the Lord, how immeasurably am I indebted to His distinguishing mercy! In such case must not thanksgiving be expressed in *thanksgiving*! If my feet have been turned Heavenward then I must act as a stranger and pilgrim here. If Christ has “delivered me from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10) then my chief concern should be for a greater love and likeness to Him.—A.W.P.

