

**Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 4****April, 1940****PEACE.**

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). Having sought to show last month what the peace of Christ consisted of—namely, an unshakeable confidence in the Divine providence, an unchanging trust in God, and an unparalleled meekness—let us now endeavour to point out the causes of the same, or perhaps it would be better to say, the *springs* from which it proceeds, for the law of cause and effect obtains and operates just as truly in connection with His peace as it does with ours.

First His *implicit obedience to God*. Speaking by the Spirit of prophecy we find the Messiah declaring, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy Law is within My heart” (Psa. 40:7, 8). In Deuteronomy 10:2 Jehovah said unto Moses, “I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.” The stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed were deposited for safekeeping in the holy ark: and here (Psa. 40), we behold the blessed Antitype—the Law of God enshrined in the Messiah’s affections—in consequence of which He perfectly and perpetually kept all the requirements of that Law in thought and word and deed. Therefore could the Lord Jesus affirm, “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29), and nothing is more pleasing to God than a hearty compliance with His will.

That *peace* is both the product and reward of obedience is clear from many Passages. “Great peace have they which love Thy Law” (Psa. 119:165). All who live in this world are born unto trouble (Job 5:7), much more so must the godly expect to encounter difficulties and conflicts (Psa. 34:19). To the carnal eye no condition seems more undesirable and miserable than the state of those who serve God, yet no matter what their outward lot, peace dwells within, for “the fruit of righteousness is peace” (Isa. 32:17). But, the proportion in which that peace is enjoyed is determined by the measure of our love for and compliance with the Divine Law, for Wisdom’s ways are “ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17). Consequently, since the Lord Jesus had a fervent and unabated love for that Law and never forsook Wisdom’s paths, perfect peace ever possessed His soul.

Second His *absolute surrender to the sovereignty of God*. Of the wicked it is said, “The way of peace have they not known” (Rom. 3:17). And why is this? Because they are in revolt against God. The only true resting place is for our wills to be lost in God’s, to meekly submit to His sovereign dispensations, to thankfully receive from His hand whatever enters our lives. Uniquely was that the case with the Lord Jesus. When favoured Capernaum despised His gracious overtures, instead of being riled thereby, He exclaimed, “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11:26). He had placed Himself unreservedly under the government of God, consequently He accepted all afflictions as coming from His hand: “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). When His very soul was wrung with the most acute anguish, so far from a word of complaint escaping His lips, He declared, “Father, not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). When enduring the sufferings of the Cross—tormented by

man and experiencing the wrath of God—He meekly “bowed His head,” praying for His enemies, committing His spirit into the hands of the Father.

Third, *His unclouded fellowship with the Father*. Dwelling continually in the secret place of the Most High, He abode perpetually under the shadow of the Almighty. Jehovah was the portion of His inheritance, and therefore the lines fell unto Him "in pleasant places": setting the Lord always before Him. He knew He should not be moved (Psa. 16:5-8). Enjoying unbroken communion with God, His heart ever experienced perfect peace. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father (sustained by communing with Him) so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" (John 6:57). "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me . . . He that sent Me is *with Me*" (John 8:16, 29). He ever had the blissful consciousness of the Father's presence: "the Father is with Me" (John 16:32).

Fourth, His unshaken confidence *in the glory awaiting Him*. "Let us run with patience (fortitude) the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of faith: who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross" (Heb. 12:1, 2). The Man Christ Jesus lived in the assurance of an unseen future. He looked away from the things of time and sense, above the shows and delusions of this world, beyond its trials and sorrows, and set His affection on things in Heaven. The prospect of a future, yet certain joy, enabled Him to run His race with patience, and therefore in the immediate prospect of death He could say, "Therefore My heart is glad, and My glory rejoiceth: My flesh also shall rest in hope . . . Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand are pleasures forever more" (Psa. 16:9, 11).

"My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." There is no other peace like it, though the unregenerate often mistake the sleep of death, a drugged conscience, worldly prosperity, the enjoyment of temporal comforts, for the same. The fact is that none but those who are born of God can understand or enter into this blessed truth. The peace which the world gives is a false one, it is continued by an uncertain tenure, and at the last takes away its gift, leaving its deluded votaries to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. But the Lord Jesus gives what is truly good, solid and lasting: "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29).—A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

### 14. *The Law and Love*: Matthew 5:43-48.

Strictly speaking the contents of the last six verses of Matthew 5 contain a continuation of the same subject dealt with in the section immediately preceding them (vv. 38-42). There, we saw our Lord taking up the important matter of the Law and retaliation; here, He deals with the same theme, though from a different angle. There, He treated more especially with the negative side, declaring what the subjects of His kingdom *must not do* when they are provoked by personal affronts and private injuries: they are not to resist evil. But here, He takes up the positive aspect, stating what His followers *must do* unto those who hate and persecute them, namely, return good for evil, love for hatred. So far from being overcome with evil, the Christian is to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:20).

It will therefore be seen that in this concluding section of His exposition of the Moral Law, our Lord reached the climax in His showing how far the holiness required of His subjects exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. As Christ had taken up one Commandment after another, He had made clear the vast difference which separated the one from the other. They had systematically distorted each Precept that concerned man's relations with his fellows—lowering the Divine standard and narrowing its scope, so as to comport with the depraved inclinations of their followers. Count after count the Saviour had preferred against them: over against which He had set the elevated and inexorable spirituality of God's requirements. The contrast is radical and revolutionary: it is the contrast between error and Truth, darkness and Light, corruption and Holiness.

First, Christ had exposed their perversion of the Divine statute, "Thou shalt not kill," and had revealed how far beyond their representations this requirement extended (vv. 21-26). Second, He had condemned their unwarrantable whittling down of the Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and had shown it reached to the very thoughts and intents of the heart (vv. 27-32). Third, He had rebuked their wicked tampering with the injunction, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," and had affirmed that all unnecessary oaths of whatsoever kind were thereby prohibited (vv. 33-37). Fourth, He had shown how they had corrupted the magisterial rule of "an eye for an eye" (vv. 38-42). And finally, He dealt with their vile corruption of the Commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (vv. 43-48).

Last month we intimated that the commentators are all at sea in their understanding of Christ's, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies": they failed to see that His purpose was to reinforce the requirements of the Moral Law. The "Moral Law" we say, not merely the Mosaic Law, but that which God originally implanted in man's very nature, to be the rule of his being. The requirements of that original Moral Law (renewed at Sinai), are summed up in two things: first, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37): that is, thou shalt esteem and venerate Him supremely, delight thyself in His excellency superlatively, honour and glorify Him constantly.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:39). Here are three things: first, the duty required: "thou shalt love." Second, the ground or reason of it, because he is "thy neighbour": that is, your fellow-man, of the same order and blood as yourself. Third, the standard by which love to our neighbour is to be regulated: "as thyself," which defines both its nature and its measure. Such a requirement presupposes that we have a right temper of

mind: an upright, impartial, benevolent temper, even to perfection, without the least tincture of anything to the contrary. This is self-evident, for without such love we shall not, we cannot, love our neighbour in a true light, nor think of, nor judge of, nor feel toward him exactly as we ought. A wrong temper, a selfish, censorious, bitter spirit will inevitably give a wrong turn to all our thoughts and feelings unto him.

What is it to love our neighbour as ourself? Our love to ourself is unfeigned, fervent, active, habitual and permanent: so ought to be our love unto our neighbour. A regular self-love respects all our interests, but especially our spiritual and eternal interests: so ought our love unto our neighbour. A regular self-love prompts us to be concerned about our welfare tenderly, to seek it diligently and prudently, to rejoice in it heartily, and to be grieved for any calamities sincerely: so ought our love unto our neighbour prompt us to feel and conduct ourselves with regard to his welfare. Self-love makes us take an unfeigned *pleasure* in promoting our welfare: we do not think it hard to do so much for ourselves: we ought to have just the same genuine love to our neighbour, and thereby prove, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The kind of love which God requires us to have for our neighbour is therefore vastly superior to what is commonly called human compassion, for this is often found in the most lawless and wicked of men—it takes not its rise from regard to the Divine authority nor respect for God’s image in our fellows but springs merely from our animal constitution. The same may be said of what men term good nature: just as some beasts are better tempered than others, so some humans are milder, gentler, humbler than their fellows, yet their amiability is not influenced by any consideration for the commands of God. The same may also be said of *natural affection*. Some of the most ungodly cherish warm affection to their wives and children, yea, make veritable idols of them—working and toiling day and night for them—to the utter neglect of God and their souls. Yet all this affection to their children does not prompt them to strive for their spiritual and eternal welfare. It is but natural fondness and not a holy love.

Now let it be clearly grasped that our Lord’s purpose in the last six verses of Matthew 5 was to purge this great and general commandment of the second table of the Law—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”—from the corrupt interpretations of the Jewish teachers and to restore it to its true and proper meaning. And as was His method in the previous sections, Christ here specifies first, the error of the rabbis, and then proceeds to enforce the rightful application of the Divine precepts. Their error was twofold: first, the unwarrantable restricting of the term “neighbour” to those who were friendly disposed towards them. Second, the drawing from it of the false and wicked inference that it was lawful to hate their enemies. How closely modern Christendom approximates to degenerate Judaism in this respect. We must leave the reader to judge.

Having shown, again and again, what our Lord was engaged in doing throughout the whole of this part of His Sermon (vv. 17-48) let us now point out His evident *design* in the same. To make this the more obvious, let the reader endeavour to place himself among Christ’s audience on this occasion and imagine that it was the *first* time you had ever heard such teaching, as you listened carefully to Christ’s emphatic and searching words “I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20). As you pondered His, “But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (v. 22), as you weighed His,

“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (v. 28), what would be the effect produced upon you?

Face that question fairly and squarely, my reader. Had you stood on the slope of that Mount and listened to Him who spoke as never men spoke—for He was God incarnate, the Lawgiver Himself now interpreting and enforcing the demands of His holy, just, and spiritual Law. As you honestly measured yourself by such pure and exalted requirements, what had been your reaction? Had you not been obliged to hang your head in shame? to acknowledge how far, far short you came of measuring up to such a heavenly standard? to own that when weighed in such a balance you were found woefully wanting, yea that you were lighter than vanity? If you were honest with yourself, could you say anything less than that such a Law utterly condemned you at every point, that before it you must confess yourself to be guilty, utterly undone, a lost sinner?

And then as you listened to the passage we have now reached and heard the Son of God affirm, “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” (v. 44), how had you felt? Would you be filled with resentment and exclaim, Such a request is impracticable and absurd? Why, I instinctively, automatically, inevitably resent ill treatment and feel ill-will against those who hate and injure me. I cannot do otherwise: no efforts of mine can reverse the spontaneous impulses of my heart: I cannot change my own nature. Again we ask, would the attentive weighing of this demand, “Love your enemies,” evoke the angry retort, Such a requirement is preposterous, it is an impossibility, no man can obey it? If so, you would be but furnishing proof that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

Hearken now unto the final demand made by Christ in this connection: “Be ye therefore *perfect*,” and so that there should not be the slightest room for uncertainty, He added, “even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Do you say that this is too high for us to reach, that such a standard is unobtainable by flesh and blood? We answer, It is the standard which God Himself has set before us, before all men. It was God’s standard before the Fall, and it is His standard still, for though man has lost his power to comply, God has not lost His right to require what is due Him. And why is it that man is no longer able to meet this righteous demand? Because his heart is corrupt: because he is totally depraved. But that in no wise excuses him: rather is it the very thing which renders him thoroughly guilty and his case inexcusable.

Cannot the reader now perceive clearly the design of Christ in pressing upon His hearers the exalted spirituality of the Divine Law and the inexorableness or immutability of its requirements? It was to shatter the vain hopes of His hearers, to slay their self-righteousness. Of old it had been said, “But who shall abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner’s fire” (Mal. 3:2), which was then receiving its fulfillment, as the preceding verse (concerning John the Baptist) shows. If the heart of fallen man was so corrupt that he could not love his enemies, then he was in dire need of a new heart. If to be perfect as the Father in Heaven is perfect was wholly beyond him, and wholly contrary to him, then his need of being *born again* was self-evident.

After all that has been before us none should be surprised to learn that during the past 50 years there has been such a strong and widespread effort made to get rid of the flesh-withering teaching of this part of our Lord’s ministry. Those professing to be the towers of orthodoxy and

the most enlightened among Bible teachers have blatantly and dogmatically affirmed that, “the Sermon on the Mount is *not for us*,” that it is “Jewish,” that it pertains to a future dispensation, that it sets forth the righteousness which will obtain in “the millennial kingdom.” And this Satanic sop was eagerly devoured by multitudes of those who attended the “Second Coming of Christ” conferences, and were carried by them into many of the “churches,” their pastors being freely supplied with “dispensational” literature dealing with this fatal error. Slowly but surely this evil leaven has worked until a very considerable and influential section of what passes as orthodox Christianity has been poisoned by it.

The fundamental error of those men claiming to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” is their opposition to and repudiation of the Law of God: their insistence that it is solely Jewish, that the Gentiles were never under it, and that it is not now the believer’s Rule of Life. Never has the Devil succeeded in palming off for the Truth a more soul-destroying lie than this. Where there is no exposition of the Moral Law and no pressing of its righteous demands—where there is no faithful turning of its holy and searching light upon the deceitful heart—there will be, there can be, no genuine conversions, for “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). It is by the Law alone we can learn the real nature of sin, the fearful extent of its ramifications, and the penalty passed upon it. The Law of God is hated by man—religious and irreligious alike—because it condemns him and demonstrates him to be in high revolt against its Giver.

Knowing full well the detestation of their hearers for the Divine Law, a large percentage of those who have occupied the pulpits during the past few decades have studiously banished it therefrom, displacing it with “studies in Prophecy” and what they designate as “the Gospel of the Grace of God.” But the “Gospel” preached by these blind leaders of the blind was “another Gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Where there is no enforcing the requirements of the Law, there can be no preaching of God’s Gospel, for so far from the latter being opposed to the former, it “*establishes*” the same (Rom. 3:31). Consequently, the “churches” became filled with spurious converts, who trampled the Law of God beneath their feet. And this, more than anything else, accounts for the lawlessness which now obtains everywhere in Church and State alike.

So far from the Gentiles never having received the Law of God, the Apostle to the Gentiles expressly declares, “Now we know that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law: that *every* mouth may be stopped, and all *the world* may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). What could possibly be plainer? Even if the “every mouth” did not signify all without exception, it must at the very least mean all without distinction, and therefore would include Jew and Gentile alike. But as though to remove any uncertainty, it is added, “all the world,” that is, the entire number of the ungodly. However much the wicked may now murmur against God’s Law, in the Day of Judgment every one of them shall be silent—convicted and confounded. Before the Divine tribunal every sinner will be brought in guilty by the Law, to his utter confusion and eternal undoing. However far they may have previously succeeded in an attempt at self-extenuation or of vindicating themselves before their fellows, when they shall stand “before God” their own consciences will utterly condemn them.

Then how vitally important, how absolutely essential it is, that the Law should be plainly and insistently enforced *now*. Nothing is more urgently needed today than discourses patterned after our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. It is the bounden duty of His servants to press upon their hearers the Divine authority, the exalted spirituality, the inexorable demands of the Moral Law.

Nothing is so calculated to expose the worthlessness of the empty profession of modern religionists. Let them be informed that nothing less than loving God with all their heart and strength, and to love their neighbours as themselves, is required of them, and that the slightest failure to render the same brings them in guilty, and thus exposes them to the certainty of everlasting woe; and either they will bow in self-condemnation before the Divine sentence or they will come out in their true colours and rail against it.

Then see to it, preachers, that you faithfully set forth the unchanging requirements of the thrice holy God. Spare no efforts in bringing your congregations to understand *what is signified* in loving God with all the heart, and *all that is involved* in loving our neighbours as ourselves. How otherwise shall they be brought to know their guilt? Unless they are made to feel how totally contrary to God is their depraved nature, how shall they discover their imperative need of being born again? True, such preaching will not increase your popularity, rather will it evoke opposition. But remember that the Saviour Himself was hounded to death not for proclaiming the Gospel, but for enforcing the Law! Even though *you* be persecuted, yours will be the satisfaction of knowing your skirts are clear from the blood of your hearers.—A.W.P.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

### 4. *By the Brook.*

“Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17). Elijah is here brought before us as an example of what may be accomplished by the earnest prayers of one “righteous man” (v. 16). Ah, my reader, mark well the descriptive adjective, for it is not every man, nor even every Christian, who obtains definite answers to his prayers; far from it. A “righteous man” is one who is right with God in a practical way: one whose conduct is pleasing in His sight, one who keeps his garments unspotted from the world, who is in separation from religious evil, for there is no evil on earth half so dishonouring and displeasing to God as religious evil (see Luke 10:12-15, Rev. 11:8). Such an one has the ear of Heaven, for there is no moral barrier between his soul and a sin-hating God. “Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).

“He prayed earnestly that it might not rain.” What a terrible petition to present before the Majesty on high! What incalculable privation and suffering the granting of such a request would entail! The fair land of Palestine would be turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, and its inhabitants would be wasted by a protracted famine with all its attendant horrors. Then was this Prophet a cold and callous stoic, devoid of natural affection? No indeed: the Holy Spirit has taken care to tell us in this very verse that he was “a man subject to like passions as we are,” and that is mentioned immediately before the record of his fearful petition. And what does that description signify in such a connection? Why this: that though Elijah was endowed with tender sensibilities and warm regard for his fellow creatures, yet in his prayers he rose above all fleshly sentimentality.

Why was it Elijah prayed “that it might not rain?” Not because he was impervious to human suffering, not because he took a fiendish delight in witnessing the misery of his neighbours, but because he put *the glory of God* before everything else, even before his own natural feelings. Recall what has been pointed out in an earlier article concerning the spiritual conditions that then obtained in Israel. Not only was there no longer any public recognition of God throughout the length and breadth of the land, but on every side He was openly insulted and defied by Baal worshippers. Daily the tide of evil rose higher and higher, until it had now swept practically everything before it. And Elijah was “very jealous for the LORD God of hosts” (1 Kings 19:10) and longed to see His great Name vindicated and His backslidden people restored. Thus it was the glory of God and true love for Israel which actuated his petition.

Here, then, is the outstanding mark of a “righteous man” whose prayers prevail with God: though one of tender sensibilities, yet he puts the honour of the Lord before every other consideration. And God has promised “them that honour *Me* I will honour” (1 Sam. 2:30). Alas, how frequently those words are true of us: “Ye ask, and receive not; because ye *ask amiss*, that ye may consume it upon *your* lusts” (James 4:3). We “ask amiss” when natural feelings sway us, when carnal motives move us, when selfish considerations actuate us. But how different was it with Elijah. He was deeply stirred by the horrible indignities against his Master and longed to see Him given His rightful place again in Israel. “And it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months.” The Prophet failed not of his object. God never refuses to act when



faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and clearly it *was* on that ground Elijah had supplicated Him.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). It was there at that blessed Throne that Elijah obtained the strength which he so surely needed at that time. Not only was he required to keep his own skirts clear from the evil all around him, but he was called upon to exercise a holy influence upon others, by acting for God in a degenerate age, to make a serious effort to bring back the people to the God of their fathers. How essential it was, then, that he should dwell much in the secret place of the Most High, that he should obtain that grace from Him which alone could fit him for his difficult and dangerous undertaking: only thus could he be delivered from evil himself, and only thus could he hope to be instrumental in delivering others. Thereby equipped for the conflict, he entered upon his path of service endowed with Divine power.

Conscious of the Lord’s approbation, assured of the answer to his petition, sensible that the Almighty was with him, Elijah boldly confronted the wicked Ahab and announced the Divine judgment on his kingdom. But let us pause for a minute so that this weighty fact may sink into our minds, for it explains to us the more-than-human courage displayed by the servants of God in every age. What was it that made Moses so bold before Pharaoh? What was it that enabled the young David to go forth and meet the mighty Goliath? What was it that gave Paul such strength to testify as he did before Agrippa? From whence did Luther obtain such resolution that he would continue his mission? In each case the answer is the same: supernatural strength was obtained from a supernatural Source: only thus can we be energized to wrestle with the Principalities and powers of evil.

“He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:29-31). But where had Elijah learned this all-important lesson? Not in any seminary or Bible-training college, for if there were such in that day they were like those of our own degenerate time—in the hands of the Lord’s enemies. Nor can the schools of orthodoxy impart such secrets: even godly men cannot teach themselves this lesson, much less can they impart it to others. Ah, my reader, as it were at “the backside of the desert” (Exo. 3:1) that the Lord appeared to and commissioned Moses, so it was in the solitude of Gilead that Elijah had communed with Jehovah and had been trained by Him for his arduous duties: there he had “waited” upon the Lord, and there had he obtained “strength” for his task.

None but the living God can effectually say unto His servant, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). Thus granted the consciousness of the Lord’s presence, His servant goes forth, “as bold as a lion,” fearing no man, kept in perfect calm amid the most trying circumstances. It was in such a spirit that the Tishbite confronted Ahab: “as the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.” But how little that apostate monarch knew of the secret exercises of the Prophet’s soul ere he thus came forth to address his conscience! “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to *my* word”: very striking and blessed is that. The Prophet spoke with the utmost assurance and authority, for he

was delivering God's message—the servant identifying himself with his Master. Such should ever be the demeanour of the minister of Christ: “we speak that we do know and testify that we have seen” (John 3:11).

“And the word of the Lord came unto him” (1 Kings 17:2). How blessed! yet this is not likely to be perceived unless we ponder the same in the light of the foregoing. From the preceding verse we learn that Elijah had faithfully discharged his commission, and here we find the Lord speaking anew to His servant: thus we regard the latter as a gracious reward of the former. This is ever the Lord's way, delighting to commune with those who delight to do His will. It is a profitable line of study to trace this expression throughout the Scriptures. God does not grant fresh revelations until there has been a compliance with those *already* received: we may see a case of this in the early life of Abraham. “The Lord had said unto Abraham get thee . . . unto the land that I will show thee” (Gen. 12:1); but instead, he went only half way and settled in Haran (11:31), and it was not until he left there and fully obeyed that the Lord again appeared to him (Gen. 12:4-7).

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith” (1 Kings 17:2, 3). An important practical truth is hereby exemplified. God leads His servants step by step. Necessarily so, for the path which they are called to tread is that of faith, and faith is opposed to both sight and independence. It is not the Lord's way to reveal to us the whole course which is to be traversed: rather does He restrict His light to one step at a time, that we may be kept in continual dependence upon Him. This is a most salutary lesson, yet it is one that the flesh is far from relishing, especially in those who are naturally energetic and zealous. Before he left Gilead for Samaria to deliver his solemn message, the Prophet would no doubt wonder what he should do as soon as it was delivered. But *that* was no concern of his, then—he was to obey the Divine order and leave God to make known what he should do next.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6.) Ah, my reader, had Elijah then leaned unto his own understanding we may depend upon it that hiding himself by the brook Cherith is the last course he would have selected. Had he followed his instincts, yea had he done that which he considered most glorifying to God, would he not have embarked upon a preaching tour throughout the towns and villages of Samaria? Would he not have felt it was his bounden duty to do everything in his power calculated to awaken the slumbering conscience of the public, so that his subjects—horried at the prevailing idolatry—would bring pressure to bear upon Ahab to put a stop to it? Yet that was the very thing God would not have him do: what then is reasoning or natural inclinations worth in connection with Divine things? Nothing.

“And the word of the LORD came to him.” Note it is not said, “the will of the Lord was revealed to him” or “the *mind* of God was made known”: we would particularly emphasize this detail, for it is a point on which there is no little confusion today. There are numbers who mystify themselves and others by a lot of pious talk about “obtaining the Lord's mind” or “discovering God's will” for them, which when carefully analyzed amounts to nothing better than a vague uncertainty or a personal impulse. God's “mind” or “will,” my reader, is made known in *His Word*, and He never “wills” anything for us which to the slightest degree clashes with that

heavenly Rule. Changing the emphasis, note, “the Word of the Lord *came to him*”: there was no need for him to go and search for it! (see Deut. 30:11-14).

And what a “word” it was that came to Elijah: “Get thee hence, and turn the eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan” (1 Kings 17:3). Verily God’s thoughts and ways are indeed entirely different from ours: yes, and He alone can “make known” (Psa. 103:7) the same unto us. It is almost amusing to see how the commentators have quite wandered from the track here, for almost one and all of them explain the Lord’s command as being given for the purpose of providing *protection* for His servant. As the death-dealing drought continued, the perturbation of Ahab would increase more and more, and as he remembered the Prophet’s language that there should be neither dew nor rain but according to *his* word, his rage against him would know no bounds. Elijah, then, must be provided with a refuge if his life was to be spared. Yet Ahab made no attempt to slay him when next they met (1 Kings 18:17-20)! Should it be answered, That was because God’s restraining hand was upon the king: we answer, Granted, but was not God able to restrain him all through the interval?

No, the reason for the Lord’s order to His servant must be sought elsewhere, and surely that is not far to ascertain. Once it be recognized that next to the bestowments of His Word and the Holy Spirit to apply the same, the most valuable gifts He grants any people is the sending of His own qualified servants among them, and that the greatest possible *calamity* which can befall any land is God’s withdrawal of those whom He appoints to minister unto the soul, and no uncertainty should remain. The drought on Ahab’s kingdom was a Divine scourge and in keeping therewith the Lord bade His Prophet “get thee hence.” The removal of the ministers of His truth is a sure sign of God’s displeasure, a token that He is dealing in judgment with a people who have provoked Him to anger.

It should be pointed out that the Hebrew word for “hide” (1 Kings 17:3) is an entirely different one from that which is found in Joshua 6:17-25 (Rahab’s hiding of the spies) and in 1 Kings 18:4, 13: the word used in connection with Elijah might well be rendered “turn thee eastward and *absent* thyself,” as it is in Genesis 31:49. Of old the Psalmist had asked, “O God, Why hast Thou cast us off forever? why doth Thine anger smoke against the sheep of Thy pasture?” (74:1). And what was it that caused him to make this plaintive inquiry? what had happened to make him realize that the anger of God was burning against Israel? This: “They have cast fire into Thy sanctuary . . . they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land . . . we see not our signs: *there is no more any Prophet*” (vv. 7-9). It was the doing away with the public means of grace which was the sure sign of the Divine displeasure.

Ah, my reader, little as it may be realized in our day, there is no surer and more solemn proof that God is hiding His face from a people or nation than for Him to *deprive them* of the inestimable blessing of those who faithfully minister His Holy Word to them, for as far as heavenly mercies excel earthly so much more dreadful are spiritual calamities than material ones. Through Moses the Lord declared, “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb and as the showers upon the grass” (Deut. 32:2). And now all dew and rain was to be withheld from Ahab’s land, not only literally so, but spiritually so as well. Those who ministered His Word were removed from the scene of public action (cf. 1 Kings 18:4).

If further proof of the Scripturalness of our interpretation of 1 Kings 17:3 be required, we refer the reader to, “And though the LORD give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be *removed into a corner* any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers” (Isa. 30:20). What could be plainer than that? For the Lord to remove His teachers into a corner was the sorest loss His people could suffer, for here He tells them that His wrath shall be tempered with mercy, that though He gave them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction yet He would not again deprive them of those who ministered unto their souls. Finally, we would remind the reader of Christ’s statement that there was “great famine” in the land in Elijah’s time (Luke 4:9-5) and link up with the same, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of *hearing the words of the LORD*. And they shall wander from sea to sea and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the LORD, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11, 12).—A.W.P.

## THE HOLY SABBATH.

### 9. Its opposition.

Popery succeeded at length in well nigh wearing out the saints and exterminating all who had borne testimony against her pernicious errors. The Waldensian Church was almost wholly destroyed or silenced. A reformation was attempted in Bohemia, but it was ruthlessly suppressed. Long had the Scriptures been a sealed book, not only to the masses, but because of their gross ignorance, to many of the priests as well. There had ceased to be any Christian Sabbath in the sense of a holy rest in the lands where Romanism dominated. The Lord's Day had been degraded into a day of special recreation, amusement, public shows and exhibitions—in short, of anything and everything to the utmost possible degree distinct and remote from the very appearance of sacredness. Thus the Devil seemed to have triumphed completely.

But a mighty change was impending, one which made manifest the Lord's supremacy. As it is in the material world, so it is in the moral and spiritual realms. As the Creator has given to the sea His decree, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11), so as Governor of this world He has limited the triumphs of the wicked. In the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Satan received a check from which his kingdom has never fully recovered to this day. Under the Reformation the distinctive truths and principles of Christianity were once more publicly proclaimed and anti-Christian errors and practices boldly denounced.

In our day there are few who perceive the immensity of the task which confronted the Reformers, the difficulties they had to overcome, or the perils to which they were exposed. Papal despotism had to be encountered in the very heyday of its pride and power. Her monstrous fictions, superstitions, and idolatrous rites had to be swept away before a true and pure Christianity could appear. The vital truths of Divine revelation had to be virtually re-discovered. First to be rescued and preached was the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. Then the Bible had to be translated from the dead languages into the living tongues of many lands, and given to the people as the alone Standard of faith and sole Rule of character and conduct. Then came the tremendous task of rescuing the Lord's Day from the obscurity to which it had been consigned, when buried beneath the multitude of festival days of human invention.

The work of the Reformers was so vast, so difficult, and so arduous, and was executed under such unfavourable conditions that we need not be surprised if parts of it were not so well done as were others, or that they never themselves erred. Rather must we marvel and be thankful that so much good was accomplished under their instrumentality. In regard to the Lord's Day they failed to give a sufficiently clear and decisive exposition. While they rightly adopted the principle that the whole of the Old Testament economy was typical and had its fulfillment in the New Testament dispensation—thus disposing of the Romish figment of an official priesthood with sacrifices in the Christian Church—yet they misapplied the same principle in connection with the Sabbath. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say, they applied it in such a way as to fail in establishing the right foundations on which the sacred obligations of that day now rests.

While it is quite clear that the Reformers themselves contended for the necessity and obligation of the Christian Sabbath, maintaining the same in their own personal examples, yet it must also be admitted that they employed language and uttered sentiments which were only too susceptible of being perverted and misapplied. This in fact quickly took place, especially in the Lu-

theran churches. Never so sound doctrinally as the Calvinists, they soon became lax in their Sabbath observance. So much so was this the case that one reliable writer tells us, "To such a degree was this the case, that many pious men among the ministers of the Lutheran churches seem to have been in doubt whether the fierce wars which so long desolated Germany were to be regarded as the cause of the extreme Sabbath profanation which prevailed, or as judgments inflicted on the community on account of that profanation."

The most striking and extensive demonstration of the connection between Sabbath observance and religious prosperity was seen in the British Isles in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. All who are acquainted with the history of that period know that the Puritans were particularly distinguished by their strict adherence to the sacred rest of the Lord's Day. Nor was this characteristic confined either to the Scotts or to those who separated themselves from the Established Church, but pertained also to those who remained within her pale. It is not generally known that the Westminster Confession of Faith, which contains the strongest assertion of the Divine authority and inviolable sanctity of the Christian Sabbath ever produced, was framed by a body of about 120 divines of whom only four were Scottish and five were Independents—all the rest having received Episcopal ordination.

Now the very times when the sanctity of the Sabbath was most diligently maintained in England were those in which pure and spiritual religion was in its highest state of freedom and prosperity; and the men under whose instrumentality this obtained are the ones whose writings are still the most precious treasure of English religious literature. Never was the smile of Heaven more apparent, never did true piety flourish so extensively, never has the power of the Holy Spirit been so manifest since the days of the Apostles, yet never was a season of Divine blessing so abruptly terminated. As the restoration of Charles the Second marked the overthrow of English Puritanism, so it brought in a flood of licentiousness which soon swept over the country, for unregenerate courtiers and commoners united together in throwing odium on Sabbath observance as a product of Puritanical fanaticism.

The awful effects of widespread Sabbath desecration were soon evident, for the judgments of God fell heavily upon both the religious and social life of the nation. The first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the most awful errors in the pulpit, spiritual death in the pew, and infidelity and profligacy amongst the masses, who were only too glad to be freed from the righteous restraints which pious legislators had placed upon them. Once again Satan had won a notable victory. But not for long was he suffered to enjoy the spoils of the same. Under the fearless preaching of George Whitefield and his fellows, revival was granted and true godliness given fresh life, and the Lord's Day was once more restored unto its rightful place.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the great Enemy of God and man entered upon a new campaign, seeking to undermine the foundations of this Divine institution, attacking it from the doctrinal side. He blinded the minds of those who professed to be the ministers of Christ, and alleged champions of the Truth, causing many of them to believe that the Sabbath was obsolete, pertaining not to this dispensation—and leading others to suppose that the observance of the Sabbath in this Christian era is mainly a matter of individual option, and that a much wider latitude in what they term "Christian liberty" is now permissible. In consequence thereof, Satan succeeded in banishing all witness to the Sabbath from thousands of pulpits, and caused the standard to be grievously lowered in most of the remaining ones. This acted like a poisonous leaven, the effects from

which spread widely, until the rank and file of church-goers had no conscience on the subject: so long as they attended service once or twice, they felt they had fully discharged the obligations of the Lord's Day.

Little sagacity is required to foretell the effect upon the masses of such a poisoning of the ministry. To use a military figure: the muzzling of the pulpit on this vital truth was like the silencing of the guns on a fortress. "Once its cannons are put out of action, the capture of the citadel quickly follows. When those who were looked up to as the expounders of the Divine Law discredited the Sabbath, then who was left to offer real resistance to godless politicians playing fast and loose with those statutes of the realm which had once been framed for the purpose of preventing Sabbath profanation? If the rank and file of professing Christians considered they had discharged the obligations of the Sabbath merely by attending one or two religious services on that day, then need we be surprised if the irreligious masses clamoured louder and louder for a "brighter Sunday" and that those in governmental authority more and more yielded to their demands!

We shall now consider some of the arguments made use of by those who have insisted that the Sabbath pertains not to this dispensation. First, it has been asserted that the Ten Commandments were never given to anyone but the Jews. Such a postulate is most absurd. If the Moral Law be not binding upon Gentiles, then by what standard will God judge them? "Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). The erroneousness of such a postulate is made clearly manifest by, "Now we know that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Nothing could be plainer than that: the whole human race is "under the Law" and every member of it is brought in guilty by the same.

Second, it has been asserted that, whatever be the status and state of the unregenerate, yet Christians are "not under the Law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). Those who have read this magazine for any length of time will not be misled here by the mere *sound* of words. We have often explained their *sense*, and shown that the believer is no longer "under the Law" as a Covenant of Works, nor is he any more under its awful curse and condemnation—but as 1 Corinthians 9:21 definitely declares, he is "under the Law to Christ"—under it as a Rule of conduct. The Christian is required to "so walk even as He (the Lord Jesus) walked" (1 John 2:6), and *Christ* ever walked in perfect accord with the Moral Law (Psa. 40:8). The Holy Spirit has been given to the Christian for the express purpose of enabling him therein, the love of God being shed abroad in his heart for its fulfillment (Rom. 5:8 and 13:8-10).

It has been objected by others that the Sabbath precept in the Old Testament was entirely of a typical and ceremonial nature, looking forward to that spiritual rest which Christ should provide, and that when the substance was brought in, the shadow was done away. But were *that* the case, then the Moral Law consists of only nine and not "Ten Commandments" as Deuteronomy 4:13 specifically declares. The very fact that the Sabbath statute was incorporated into the Decalogue unequivocally denotes its essential moral character, and therefore, its lasting nature—the Fourth Commandment was, like the other nine, written by the finger of Jehovah upon the tables of stone, but no part of the ceremonial law was. Moreover, the Sabbath was instituted *long before* any part of the ceremonial law was given to Israel, before there were any types or shadows, be-

fore any promise of Christ was made. The Sabbath was appointed in Eden before the Fall, *before* there was any need for sacrifices!

Appeal has been made unto Galatians 4:10, 11 by those who are determined to banish the Sabbath from this dispensation: "Ye observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." The reference there is to the Judaizing of the Galatian saints—to their being brought under bondage to the ceremonial law of Israel. False teachers had gone so far as to insist they must be circumcised in order to salvation: see Galatians 5:2, 6; 6:15. The "days" and "months" were those connected with the Jewish festivals, which were now obsolete: the very fact that the Holy Spirit here designated them, "the weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9) is clear proof that the Christian Sabbath was *not* there included, for it could never be described in such a way.

Appeal has also been made to, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy day or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days" (Col. 2:16). This is the favourite verse of those who insist that the Sabbath is not binding on Christians. That they refer to such a passage shows how untenable is their position. The Greek word here for "Sabbath" is in the plural number (as the translators denoted by adding "days" in italics), which intimates it is not the weekly Sabbath or the Moral Law that is in view. Moreover, there is no definite article before "Sabbaths," which is proof positive that the weekly Sabbath was not before the Apostle's mind. It was to things connected with the *ceremonial law* against which the Colossians were being warned, as the "meat," "drink," and "new moon" show.

Some have raised a silly objection drawn from the difference made by the meridian, from which it is argued it is impossible that all men could observe precisely the *same* day, and therefore God never intended they should. Now if men sailing either eastward or westward did not continually have seven days succeeding one another there would be some force in this trifle, but since the Sabbath statute simply requires from men one seventh of their time, or a seventh day, separated unto God and sanctified to His service, the objection is quite pointless. That the observance of this rest day should in all parts of the earth begin and end at the same minute, the Scriptures nowhere enjoin nor does the creation of God permit. It is sufficient that whether living in the northern or the southern hemisphere that all men observe the same *proportion* of time.

After all our articles on the Christianization of the Sabbath, especially the exposition of Hebrews 4:8-10, there is little need for us to refute seriatim the errors of those who insist that the Sabbath should, even now, be kept on Saturday rather than Sunday. The essential feature to be noted is that God requires us to set apart *one seventh of our time* and consecrate the same unto His worship. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it specified that the Lord ever commanded any people to observe the *seventh day of the week*—rather six days of work (without defining which days) followed by one of rest. Nor does the transference of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday involve any alteration in the Law, but merely a change in its *administration*.

It is true that the Apostles for a season, while their ministry had a special regard for the Jews (Rom. 1:16), for the conversion of that remnant among them according to the election of grace, went frequently into their synagogues on the seventh day to preach the Gospel (Acts 13:14; 16:13, etc). Yet it is evident they did so only to take opportunity of their assemblies, that they might preach to greater numbers of them, and that at a time when they were prepared to attend unto sacred things. Upon the same ground and for the same reason we find Paul endeavouring to



be at Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). But we nowhere read that *Christians* at any time assembled together on the seventh day for the worship of God.

And now our task is completed, very imperfectly so, we are fully conscious. But if the Lord is pleased to own these feeble efforts unto a stirring up of His people for a stricter observing of this Divine ordinance and in using their influence to protest against its awful profanation, we shall not have laboured in vain.—A.W.P.

“A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content,  
And strength for the toils of the morrow:  
But a Sabbath profaned, whate’er may be gained,  
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.”

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

### 2. *Its Reality.*

The spiritual impotency of the natural man is no mere product of theological dyspepsia, nor is it a dismal dogma invented during the dark ages. No, it is a solemn *fact*: affirmed by Holy Writ, manifested throughout human history and confirmed in the conscious experience of every genuinely convicted soul. True, the moral powerlessness of the sinner is not proclaimed by the pulpit today, nor is it believed by professing Christians generally. True, also, when it *is* insisted upon that man is so completely the bondsman of sin he cannot move towards God, the vast majority will regard it as literally unreasonable and reject it with scorn. To tell those who deem themselves to be hale and hearty that they are without strength, strikes them as a preposterous postulate, quite unworthy of serious consideration.

When a servant of God does press this unwelcome truth upon his hearers, the fertile mind of unbelief promptly replies with one objection after another. If we are totally devoid of spiritual ability, then assuredly we must be aware of the fact—but so far from that being the case, says the skeptic, we are very sensible of our power to do that which is pleasing in God's sight: even though we perform it not, we *could* if we wanted to. Again, it is rejoined, were we so completely the captives of Satan as you declare, then we should not be free agents at all, and such a concept as that we will not allow for a moment. Again—if man has no power to do that which God requires, then obviously he would not be a responsible creature, for he could not justly be held accountable to do that which was beyond his powers to achieve.

From what has been pointed out above it will be seen that before any attempt is made to open up our subject we must establish the fact of man's spiritual impotency and show that it is a *solemn reality*. Until we do this, it is useless to discuss the nature of that impotency, its seat, its extent, or its cause. And it is to the inspired Word of God alone that we shall make our appeal, for if the Scriptures of Truth plainly teach this doctrine then we are on sure ground, and dare not reject its testimony thereto even though no one else on earth believed the same. If the Divine Oracles affirm it, then none of the objections brought against it by the carnal mind can have any weight with us, though in due course we shall endeavour to show that these objections are as pointless as they are groundless.

In approaching more definitely the task now before us it should be pointed out that strictly speaking it is the subject of *human depravity* which we are going to write upon, yet to have so designated these articles would be rather misleading as we are going to confine ourselves to only one aspect of it. The spiritual impotency of the natural man forms a distinct and separate branch of his depravity. The state of evil into which the Fall has plunged us is far more dreadful and its dire consequences far more wide-reaching than is commonly supposed. The common idea is that though man be fallen yet he is not so badly damaged but that he may recover himself, providing he properly exercises his remaining strength or with due attention improves the help proffered him. But his case is vastly more serious than that.

"The three main elements involved in the consequences entailed by the sin of Adam upon his posterity are these. First, the guilt, or just penal responsibility of Adam's first sin or apostatising act, which is imputed or judicially charged upon his descendants, whereby every child is born into the world in a state of antenatal forfeiture or condemnation. Second, the entire depravity of our nature, involving a sinful innate disposition inevitably leading to actual transgression. Third,

the entire inability of the soul to change its own nature, or to do anything spiritually good in obedience to the Divine Law" (A. A. Hodge). It is the third of these direful consequences of the Fall which is now to engage our attention.

Let us begin by considering some of the plain declarations of our Lord upon this solemn subject. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he *cannot see* the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Until a man be born again he remains in his natural, fallen and depraved state, and so long as that is the case with him it is utterly impossible for him to discern or perceive Divine things. Sin has both darkened his understanding and destroyed his visive faculty. "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble" (Prov. 4:19). Though Divine instruction be supplied them, though God has given them His Word in which the way to Heaven is plainly marked out, yet they are incapable of profiting from the same. Moses represented them as "groping at noonday" (Deut. 28:29), and Job declares, "they meet with darkness in the day-time and grope in the noonday as in the night" (5:14). Jeremiah depicts them as walking in "slippery ways in the darkness" (23:12).

Now this darkness which envelopes the natural man is a moral one, having its seat in the soul. Our Saviour declared, "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:22, 23). The heart is the same to the soul as the eye is to the body. As a sound eye lets in natural light, so a good heart lets in spiritual light, and as a blind eye shuts out natural light so an evil heart shuts out spiritual light. Accordingly we find the Apostle expressly ascribing the darkness of the understanding to the blindness of the heart. He represents all men as "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, *because of the blindness of their heart*" (Eph. 4:18).

While sinners remain under the entire dominion of a wicked heart they are altogether blind to the spiritual excellence of the character, of the works and of the ways of God. "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding, which have eyes *and see not*, which have ears and hear not" (Jer. 5:21). The natural man is blind. This awful fact was affirmed again and again by our Lord: "they be blind leaders of the blind" (Matt. 15:14); "Ye blind guides . . . Thou blind Pharisee" (Matt. 23:24, 26). So, too, Paul: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. 4:4). There is in the unregenerate mind an incompetence, an incapacity, an inability to understand the things of the Spirit, and the repeated miracle which Christ wrought in restoring sight to the naturally blind was designed to teach us our imperative need of the same Divine power recovering to the soul our *spiritual vision*.

A question has been raised at this point as to whether this blindness of the natural man be partial or total, whether it be simply a defective vision or whether he has none at all. The answer is that the nature of his disease may best be defined as spiritual myopia or shortsightedness: he is able to behold clearly objects which are near by, but distant ones lie wholly beyond the range of his vision. In other words, the mind's eye of the sinner is capable of perceiving *natural* things, but he has no ability to see *spiritual* things. Thus it is expressed in Holy Writ, the one who "lacketh these things," namely, the graces of faith, virtue, knowledge, etc., mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7, is "blind and *cannot see afar off*" (v. 9), and therefore is he bidden to buy of Christ "eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:18).

It was for this very purpose that the Son of God came into the world: to give “deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18), and concerning those who are made the subjects of this miracle of grace it is said, “for ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). This is the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise: “I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). God is light, and therefore those who are alienated from Him are in complete spiritual darkness. They see not the frightful danger to which they are exposed. Though they are led captive by Satan from day to day and year to year, they are totally unaware of his malignant influence over them. They are blind to the nature and tendency of their religious performances, failing to perceive that no matter how earnestly they engage in the same, they cannot be acceptable to God while their minds are enmity against Him. They are blind to the way and means of recovery.

The awful thing is that the natural man is quite blind to the blindness of his heart which is insensibly leading him to “the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude 13). That is why the vast majority of mankind live so securely and peacefully. It has always appeared strange to the godly why the ungodly can be so unconcerned while under sentence of death, and conduct themselves so frivolously and gaily while exposed to the Wrath to Come. John was surprised to see the wicked spending their days in carnality and feasting. David was grieved at the prosperity of the wicked and could not account for their not being in trouble as other men. Amos was astonished to behold the sinners in Zion living at ease, putting far away from them the evil day, lying upon beds of ivory. Nothing but their spiritual blindness can explain the conduct of the vast majority of mankind, crying peace and safety when exposed to impending destruction.

Since all sinners are involved in such spiritual darkness as makes them unaware of their present condition and condemnation, then it is not surprising that they are so displeased when their fearful danger is plainly pointed out. Such faithful preaching tends to disturb their present peace and comfort and destroys all their future hopes and prospect of happiness. If they were once made to truly realize their imminent danger of the damnation of Hell, their ease, security and joy, would be completely dispelled. They cannot bear, therefore, to hear the plain truth respecting their wretchedness and guilt. Sinners could not bear to hear the plain teachings of the Prophets or Christ on this account: it was this which explains their bitter complaints and fierce opposition. Those who would befriend them are regarded as enemies: they stop their ears and flee from them.

That the natural man, yea even the most zealous religionist, has no perception of his spiritual blindness, and that he is highly displeased when charged with the same, is evident from, “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, are we blind also? And Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:39-41). It was for the purpose of bringing to light the hidden things of darkness that God’s Son became incarnate: to expose things that those made conscious of their blindness might receive sight, but that they who had spiritual sight in *their own estimation* should be “made blind”—judicially abandoned to the pride of their evil hearts. But for such an experience the infatuated Pharisees had no desire, and denying their blindness were left in their sin.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). He cannot see the things of God because by nature he is enveloped in total spiritual darkness, and even though external light be given him, yet he has no eyes with which to see. “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). No, when the Lord of life and light appeared in their midst, men had no eyes to see His beauty, but despised and rejected Him. And so it is still—every verse in Scripture which treats of the Spirit’s illumination confirms this solemn fact. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). This giving of light and knowledge is by Divine power, being analogous to that by which the light at the first creation was provided. As to all spiritual, saving knowledge of the Truth, the mind of fallen man is like the chaos before God said, Let there be light—“darkness was upon the face of the deep,” and in that state it is impossible for men to understand the things of the Spirit.

But not only is the understanding of the natural man completely under the dominion of darkness, but his will is paralyzed unto good, and if that is so, then the sinner is indeed impotent. As this branch of our subject will (D.V.) come before us in future articles we shall only touch briefly upon it here. The fact itself is made clear by Christ when He affirmed, “*no man can* come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). And why is it that the sinner cannot come to Christ by his own unaided powers? Because he has no inclination to do so, and therefore no volition in that direction. “Ye will not come to Me,” said the Saviour (John 5:40), or “ye are unwilling” or “have not the will to come to Me” as the Greek might be rendered. There is not the slightest desire in the unregenerate heart to do so.

The will of fallen man is depraved, being completely in bondage to sin. It is not merely that there is a negative lack of inclination, but there is a positive *disinclination*. The unwillingness consists of aversion: “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, *neither indeed can be*” (Rom. 8:7). And not only is there an aversion against God, there is a hatred of Him: said Christ to His disciples, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). This hatred is inveterate obstinacy: “the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people” (Exo. 32:9), “All day long have I stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). Man is incorrigible and in himself his case is hopeless. “Thy people shall be willing in the day of *Thy Power*” (Psa. 110:3)—because they have no power whatsoever of their own to effect such willingness.

Finally, since we have demonstrated from the Scriptures of Truth that the natural man is utterly unable to discern spiritual things, much less to choose them, there is little need for us to labour the point that he is quite incompetent to perform any spiritual act. Nor is this only a logical inference drawn by theologians: it is expressly affirmed in the Word—“So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom. 8:8). There is no denying the meaning of that terrible indictment, as there is no likelihood of its originating with man himself. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). No, all power to direct our steps in the paths of righteousness was lost by us at the Fall, and therefore are we entirely dependent upon God to work in us “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Little as this solemn truth of man's moral impotency is known today, and widely as it is denied by modern thought and teaching, there was a time when it was generally contended for in these favoured Isles. In proof we will give short quotations and therewith close this article. In the "Thirty-nine Articles" of the Church of England (to which all her ministers must still solemnly and formally subscribe) the Tenth reads thus, "The condition of man after the Fall of Adam is such that he *cannot* turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have *no power* to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God." In the Westminster Confession of Faith (the Standard of Presbyterianism) chapter 6 begins thus: "Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are *utterly indisposed*, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions."—A.W.P.

### FAITH TO WORK MIRACLES.

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). We have already seen that this promise was made to those who had been endowed with supernatural powers, and that it was given for the purpose of encouraging them to exercise faith that Christ would continue to assist in their *working of miracles*, for the glory of His name and the good of His cause. We have also shown that the Apostles themselves had no warrant whatever to apply this particular promise to ordinary blessings of either a temporal or spiritual nature. It should, therefore, be quite apparent that Christians today have no right to appropriate this promise unto themselves and expect a literal fulfillment of the same. To make this still clearer, let the following considerations be carefully weighed.

Even the primitive Christians themselves were not all endowed with supernatural gifts. Proof of this is found in that statement of the Apostles, “Are all Apostles? are all Prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:29-30). This is the more striking in that those extraordinary gifts abounded more copiously at Corinth than in any of the apostolic churches; yet these questions, with their strong emphasis, clearly denotes that there was *not* an equality of endowment. Paul’s obvious design here was to suppress on the one hand all discontent and envy, and on the other all pride and arrogance, for he had expressly reminded them that the Spirit apportioned His gifts “to every man severally as *He* will” (v. 11).

The manifest limitation of the promise we are here considering forbids that Christians today should give it a general and universal application: “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” There are very few passages in Scripture where the expression “all things” is to be understood without qualification, and certainly this is not one of those few. The preceding “and” clearly connects with what is said in verse 21, and therefore must signify all such things as are *there* in view, namely, the working of miracles. As we have previously pointed out, this promise did not even give the Apostles themselves carte blanche, so that if they prayed for anything whatever (provided they did so with unshaken faith) they were infallibly assured of receiving the same. How much less, then, may ordinary Christians today give such a scope to this promise!

Scripture itself records more than one instance of pious souls earnestly supplicating God for certain things, and the Holy Spirit has conveyed no suggestion that it was because they prayed unbelievably their requests were not granted. Moses (Deut. 3:23-26) is a case in point. So also David both fasted and prayed on behalf of his sick child that it might recover, yet it died (2 Sam. 12:16-19). So, too, in this New Testament era we find that the beloved Apostle besought the Lord thrice that his thorn in the flesh might be removed (2 Cor. 12:7-9), yet it was not; though he received assurance from the Lord, “My grace is sufficient for thee”—to endure the affliction. Most certainly Paul was acquainted with this promise in Matthew 21:22! Surely, then, Christians now have no right to exercise faith in it when praying for anything.

If Christians of this day determine to appropriate Matthew 21:22 unto themselves, then they must do so on the principle that believing a thing *to be true* will *make it true*. The language used by Christ on that occasion is too clear to be mistaken: “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”—to the same effect is, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). But this principle

that believing a thing to be true necessarily makes it true is manifestly untenable and erroneous. Were I to pray for the salvation of one whom God had not eternally chosen in Christ, no believing on my part would effect his salvation: and to insist that God *should* save him, would be presumption and *not faith*. If I were seriously sick and believed God would heal me, no such believing would bring my healing to pass; and if such were not the Lord's will for me, then such "believing" would be fanaticism and not faith.

Since Christians in our day have no right to appropriate this special promise to themselves, they have no warrant to ask for any favour, whether temporal or spiritual, private or public, absolutely and unsubmitively. True prayer is not an endeavouring to bring the Divine will into subjection to ours, but a seeking to yield up our wills to God's. What the Lord has predestinated cannot be changed by any appeals of ours, for with Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). God's eternal decrees were framed by perfect goodness and unerring wisdom, and therefore He has no need to forego the execution of any part of them: "But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth" (Job 23:13). It is a most grotesque and God-dishonouring idea to suppose that prayer has been appointed for the purpose of the creature's exercising his persuasive powers so as to induce the Almighty to give something He does not wish to bestow.

"This is the confidence that we have in Him: that if we ask anything *according to His will*, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Ah, *that* is what we need to lay hold of and act upon in this blatant and presumptuous age. We come to the Throne of Grace not as dictators, but suppliants. We approach the One seated thereon not as equals, but as beggars. We go there not to demand our rights, but to *beg* favours. We stand not on our dignity, but bow the knee in conscious unworthiness. We present not ultimatums, but make "requests." And those requests we do not make in a spirit of self-assertiveness, but in humble submissiveness. If we approach the Throne of Grace in a correct frame, we go there conscious of our ignorance and foolishness, fully assured that the Lord knows far better than we what it would be good to bestow upon us and what would be best to withhold from us.

God has infallibly purposed when and where and upon whom He will bestow His favour, and Christians have no right, and when in their right mind, no desire to ask Him *to alter* any of His determinations respecting either themselves or others. Consequently, since they have no means of knowing beforehand what He has decreed concerning the granting of any specific favour, they are not justified in asking Him for anything absolutely, but rather must they proffer each request with unreserved submission to His good pleasure. They may greatly desire to see the salvation of some particular person, but as they know not whether he is one of God's elect, they must not ask for it unconditionally, but subject to His Divine purpose. They may have a loved one who is seriously sick, and while it is both their duty and privilege to ask for his or her recovery, yet they must not pray for the same absolutely but in subjection to the will of God.

Christ has left us a perfect example of submission in prayer, as in everything else. Behold Him in the garden of Gethsemane—the ante-chamber of Calvary—entering upon His inconceivable sufferings. Mark His posture: He is not erect, but on His knees, and later on His face. Harken to His language: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). It was His holy *desire* for the Father to remove that awful cup from Him, if He were graciously pleased to do so; but if not—He asked that His



petition might be denied and the will of His Father done. Can we in the face of *that*, my reader, come before God and insist that any request of ours be granted irrespective of whether or not it be accordant with the Divine will? No indeed, rather must we earnestly seek grace to emulate the example left us by the Redeemer.

Sad indeed is it to witness and read of much that is going on in the religious world today. Nor is it that the lawless spirit of the age has had an evil influence upon the churches: rather did the evil *begin in the churches* and later infest society generally. The Law of God was banished from the pulpits before lawlessness became so rife in the state. Irreverence characterized the pew before infidelity stalked the streets. The Most High was insulted in public prayer before it became the common thing to take His name in vain on the stage and over the air. Instead of bowing before the Throne of Grace many conducted their public “devotions” as though they themselves occupied that Throne. Genuine and unreserved submission to the Divine will is now a thing of the past save among that insignificant remnant who have been given broken and contrite hearts.

Since Christians have no right, at this date, to exercise faith in the promise of Matthew 21:22, then clearly they have no right to exercise faith in their own peculiar *feelings*. The Apostles themselves who possessed supernatural powers did not believe that all things whatsoever they asked in faith should be granted to them because they had peculiar feelings respecting what they asked for; but they believed that when they requested a miracle should be wrought by them, Christ would enable them thereto, because they based their faith on His promise to that end. They knew that promise was made to their *faith*, and not to their feelings. That being the case with the Apostles themselves, how much less may the ordinary Christian now claim a fulfillment of Matthew 21:22 because of some strong feeling he is the subject of!

But though Christians today have no such promise to rest upon as Matthew 21:22, some of them have a *deep feeling* that what they pray for shall be granted. That is quite wrong and reprehensible. We have no Scriptural warrant whatever to base our confidence of being heard upon any feeling, however deep and persistent, and must not expect God to answer us unless we can plead some promise of His. There are no promises made in the Word to any *feelings*. All the promises of the Gospel are made to holy exercises or affections, and to nothing in which men are entirely passive. Our hearts are deceitful above all things, and those who rely upon inward impulses and secret feelings are in great danger of running into the grossest errors and the wildest delusions. Evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit can impress our minds.

Many have prayed for particular favours with the mistaken assurance that if they ask for them in unwavering faith those favours would certainly be granted them. This idea “led George Whitefield confidently to expect what he had no right to confidently expect. He had an amiable, promising little son, whom he ardently desired and prayed might be an eminently useful minister; and he had such strong and agreeable feelings concerning him that he confidently expected that he would be what he ardently desired and prayed that he might be. But his son died when he was about four years old and the event not only disappointed him, but cured him of his error” (N. Emmons, to whom we are indebted for several thoughts in this discussion). We may add that when C. H. Spurgeon lay dying, tens of thousands fasted and offered special prayer for the sparing of his life; but as the sequel showed, such was not according to God’s will.

In seeking to correct one error we must endeavour to guard against another. Though the promise of Matthew 21:22 belongs not unto us today, there are scores of promises in both the

Old and New Testaments which Christians *may* lawfully take to themselves and plead before God. In those promises they have all the encouragement to pray in faith which they can reasonably desire. God has never said to the seed of Jacob, “seek ye Me in vain,” but has assured them that if they pray aright they shall be heard, and either receive what they ask for or something more for His glory and their good. In order to pray aright, they must pray with a real desire for the things they request, and with a genuine submission to the will of God whether He shall grant or deny their petitions. When a believer presents suitable petitions unto God, in a right manner, grounded on the Divine promises, then he should not doubt either His willingness or ability to grant them, either on account of his own unworthiness or because of any difficulty in the way. “If we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us” (1 John 5:14).—A.W.P.

