

**Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 5**  
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**GODLY SORROW.**

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner” (2 Cor. 7:9). In his former Epistle the Apostle had sharply rebuked the Corinthians for sins which had not only been committed by them but tolerated among them. Though it be far from a pleasant task, yet it is the bounden duty of the ministers of the Gospel to rebuke sin when it is found in those under their charge. “Preach the Word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). In this instance it pleased God to bless the faithful admonition of His servant, so that those to whom he wrote had been brought to mourn over and right their wrongs. It is to this repenting of theirs that Paul here alludes, in the course of which he draws an important distinction between *carnal* and *spiritual* sorrowing over sin, a distinction which it is most essential we should duly note and take to heart.

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.” The preacher takes no more delight when he witnesses the anguish of those who are under conviction of sin than does the surgeon when he inflicts pain on his patients. The servants of Christ experience no pleasure in looking upon the distress of their hearers: it is only because the sinner’s sorrow is a hopeful sign of his return to God and of his future happiness as the outcome, that they rejoice at such fruits of their labours. A parent, when he sees his child weeping because of his offenses, sincerely rejoices however much he sympathizes in his grief. So, too, was the Apostle made happy when he perceived that the Corinthians had sorrowed to good effect, namely, unto repentance or reformation of conduct. Here is proof that evangelical repentance is not only a change of heart, but a transformation of life as well.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance” distinguishes two things which are often confounded. Sorrow for sin and repentance are by no means identical. Sorrow for sin may be awakened in a man, or even in an assembly, yet without any real or lasting benefit therefrom. There is a grief (from wounded pride) which produces resentment and anger against the one who reproves our wicked ways. There is a sorrow (aggravated by Satan) which results in nothing but melancholy and despair. Sorrow in itself is not repentance; neither is remorse, self-condemnation, nor external reformation. True, these are all the attendants and consequences; but repentance itself is a turning from sin to holiness. In the case here before us the Apostle rejoiced over a sorrow in the Corinthians which was followed by a putting away of those evils for which he had reproved them.

“Ye sorrowed to repentance.” Here, then, is a statement which supplies us with an invaluable criterion by means of which the quality of all real and lasting sorrow may be estimated. Grief may arise, and even reach a passionate extreme, and yet be as unproductive of any transforming effect upon its subjects as the summer dew upon the rock. Such is a self-allaying and not a self-abasing sorrow. There is a sorrowing over folly and its consequences which is nothing more than self-pity, and remorse is ever blind toward Heaven. The vital question, then, is, has our sorrow for sin issued in a genuine *repentance*? Evangelical repentance is a real change of heart, it is a radical change of views, feelings and aims, resulting in a complete and lasting change of life. Unless our sorrow

causes us to put away the evils which formerly characterized us, then it is a repentance which needs to be “repented of,” for it is fruitless and valueless.

“For ye were made sorry after a godly manner.” This is explanatory of the previous clause, making known to us how it was that the Corinthians came to sorrow “to repentance.” How it behooves us, then, to diligently inquire as to exactly what is meant by this sorrowing “after a godly manner,” or as the margin gives it, “according to God.” Godly sorrow is one which has respect wholly to God, for it is one which He demands, one which He produces, and one which leads to Himself. First, it is such a sorrow as the thrice Holy One requires from those upon whom He would bestow pardon of their sins—true alike of our first conversion and of each subsequent recovery from backsliding: “repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Though this godly sorrow to repentance is not the ground of our salvation, yet it is both a part of and a necessary condition to it. Those who repent are saved; the impenitent perish (Luke 13:5). It is that *inward* change in which salvation largely consists. Grief and humiliation for sin as sin—sin against *God*—are an essential part of those “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

Second, this “godly sorrow” is produced by Divine power. It is essentially a supernatural grace. No man is born with godly sorrow in his heart as he is born with a tongue in his head. No, it is a seed of God’s own setting, a flower of His planting. It is a heavenly offspring. “God maketh my heart soft” said holy Job (23:16), for none but He can make the heart tender under a sight and sense of sin. Nature can easily make one weep over worldly crosses and losses, but only Divine grace can move us to mourn over *sin*. That godly sorrow to repentance is produced by the immediate operations of the Lord is clear from the order in “Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh” (Jer. 31:19): note well it is not “after I turned,” but “after *I was* turned.” That is the language of one who has just been renewed, quickened afresh by the Word, and who now sees light in God’s light.

Third, it is such a sorrow as leads to God. All sin is a departing from God, and while the guilt of it remains upon the conscience we cannot be easy in His presence—witness Adam, who as soon as he heard the voice of the Lord God, sought to hide himself (Gen. 3:8). But when godly sorrow is wrought in the heart by God it is the means of recovery to Him, for it makes us conscious of our distance from God and of our having dishonoured and displeased Him. Necessarily so, for godly sorrow is “to repentance,” and repentance is a forsaking of sin so as to walk in newness of life. A contrite heart instinctively turns unto God, for it is the only one which possesses any title to His mercy: “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17). Indeed He will not, for His promise is, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word” (Isa. 66:2). Such a sorrowing to repentance is approved by God, for it is the product of His own grace and accomplishes its end by restoring to Himself.—A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

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

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (v. 45). For a right understanding of this most important verse it is highly essential that it be not divorced from what is recorded in verses 43 and 44. As we have shown at length the last two months, our Lord’s purpose in the last six verses of Matthew 5 was to purge this great and general commandment—“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. That love which the Moral Law demands is something vastly superior to what we term “natural affection,” which is found in the most godless, and in a lesser degree even in animals. The love which the Divine Law requires is a holy, pure, disinterested and spiritual one—exemplified perfectly by Christ. Such a love the unregenerate have not.

In these pages we have often affirmed that God’s design in regeneration is to bring us back unto conformity with His Holy Law. Therein we may perceive the beautiful harmony which exists between the distinctive workings of each of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity. The Father, as the supreme Governor of the world, framed the Moral Law as a transcript of His holy nature and an authoritative expression of His righteous will. The Son, in His office as Mediator, magnified the Law and made it honourable by rendering to it a personal, perfect and perpetual obedience, and then by voluntarily enduring its curse in the place of His people, who had broken it. The Holy Spirit, as the Executive of the Godhead, convicts the elect of their wicked violation of the Moral Law, slaying their enmity against it, and imparting to them a nature or principle the very essence of which is to delight in and serve that Law (Rom. 7:22, 25).

Originally, the Moral Law was imprinted upon the very heart of man. Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26, 27) which, among other things, signifies that they were morally conformed unto their Maker. Consequently, the very “nature” of unfallen man caused him to render loving and loyal obedience to his King. But when he fell, this was reversed. The “image” of God was broken and His “likeness” was greatly marred, though not completely effaced, for as the Apostle points out, the heathen which had not the Law in its written form “did by nature (some of) the things contained in the Law,” and thereby they “showed the work of the law written in their hearts,” their conscience being proof of the same (Rom. 2:14, 15). At the Fall, love for the Divine Law was supplanted by hatred, and submission and obedience gave place to enmity and opposition.

Such is the condition of unregenerate man the world over: he is a rebel against the Most High, trampling His commandments beneath his feet. It is for this very reason he needs to be born again, that is, be made the subject of a miracle of grace wrought in his heart. At conversion he is “reconciled to God”: his hostility against Him receives its death-wound and he throws down the weapons of his warfare. The new birth is a being “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col. 3:10): it is a new creation, a creation “in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Thereby the regenerate recover that which they lost in Adam—a nature which is in harmony with the Divine will. At the new birth God makes good that promise, “I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10): putting His laws in our mind means ef-

fectually applying them unto us, writing them in our hearts signifies the enshrining of them in our affections.

What is the character of that righteousness which Christ requires from the subjects of His kingdom?—a righteousness which excels that practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. It is conformity in heart and life to the Moral Law of God. What evidence do Christians give that they have been born again? Why the fact that they now walk “in newness of life.” Wherein lies the proof they are now reconciled to God? In their heartily responding to His revealed will. How may we identify those who have been renewed by the Spirit? By seeing displayed in them the features of the Divine image. What is the fruit of God’s putting His laws into our minds and writing them in our hearts? Surely, our running in the way of His commandments. Whereby shall the world take knowledge of us that we have been with the Lord Jesus? By seeing that we have drunk in His spirit and by our producing that which rises above the level of mere nature, which can issue only from a supernatural spring.

Now it is of this very thing Christ speaks here in Matthew 5:45: “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good” etc. First, let it be pointed out, “that ye may *be* the children of your Father” certainly does *not* denote “that ye may *become* such”: no, they were already His regenerate people, as is clear from Christ’s contrasting them from the world—“what do ye more than others?” (v. 47). “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven” obviously denotes “that ye may thereby *approve* yourselves so, that ye may *manifest* yourselves to be such.” Lest this interpretation appear somewhat strained, we refer the reader to a parallel case in 2 Corinthians 6: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you and *will be* a Father unto you, and ye *shall be My* sons and daughters” (vv. 17, 18). Those exhortations were addressed to “saints” (2 Cor. 1:1), and the promise was that upon their compliance therewith God would manifest Himself as a Father unto them and they would give proof of being His sons and daughters.

Because it is against the nature of fallen man to love his enemies, therefore our Saviour here encouraged His followers unto the exercise of such heavenly conduct by pressing upon them the *benefit* therefrom: by so doing they would give demonstration that they were the children of God. A similar inducement had been held out by Him in an earlier section of this sermon, when He said to the officers of His kingdom, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. 5:16). It is not sufficient that we profess ourselves to be the children of God: our works must declare it. If we have to wear some button or badge on the lapel of our coats so as to evidence we are Christians, that is a poor way of doing so—we must by our “good *works*” glorify God (1 Peter 2:12), we must “show forth His praises in our daily lives.

The force of the first half of verse 45 is clearly established by what follows: “For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Children resemble their parents: there is an identifying likeness between them. The character and conduct of God, in this connection, is well known: His providences declare His benignity. Not only does God bear with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, but He bestows upon them many favours. So far from making a distinction in this matter, He disburses temporal blessings among the just and

the unjust alike. As the Gospel of Luke expresses it, "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (6:35). Therein He sets His people an example to follow, hence the force of the apostolic injunction, "Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and hath given Himself for us" (Eph. 5:1-2).

From this reason or inducement here given by Christ to enforce His exhortation in verse 44 we may perceive *what are the things* in which Christians should principally employ themselves: namely, in those things in the doing of which they may obtain evidence that they are the children of God. How many Christians there are who lament their lack of assurance. And in most cases this is not to be wondered at. If they are so zealous in serving self rather than Christ, if they run so greedily after the things the world is absorbed with, how can it be otherwise? There is an inseparable connection between Romans 8:14 and 16: we must be led of the Spirit (and not resist His motions) if we are to have Him bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We must be more diligent in cultivating supernatural fruit if we would have clearer evidence of a supernatural root dwelling within us.

Ere passing on let us note how Christ here spoke of the common gifts of God in creation and providence: "He maketh *His* sun to rise." It is not simply "the sun": it is *His* sun and not ours. It is His by creation and His by regulation, making it go forward or backward as He pleases. The Lord is the sole Author and Governor of this heavenly body, for He continues to give it being and determines its power and virtue. The same thing is equally true of every other creature in Heaven, earth, or sea. In like manner He "sendeth the rain" on its specific mission: He has appointed where and when it shall fall, so that "one piece was rained upon, and the piece where upon it rained not withered" (Amos 4:7). Finally, note the terms by which Christ designates those who are the friends of God and those who are His enemies: good and just, evil and unjust—the first term relating to character, the second to conduct.

"For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?" (Matt. 5:46). In this and the following verse Christ propounded another reason to persuade His disciples and hearers to love their enemies, the force of which is only apparent when we understand who the "publicans" are. The "publicans" were those officers who collected taxes and tributes, rates and rents from the Jews for the Roman emperor, to whom the Jews were then in subjection. Some of the most degenerate of the Jews undertook this wretched work for the money they could get out of it. From Luke 19:8 it appears that the publicans resorted to injustice and oppression in order to fatten their own purses, and consequently they were the most hated and despised of all people (Matt. 9:11; 11:19). Yet, (says Christ) even these publicans, though devoid of conscience, would love those who loved them; and if we do no more, what better are we than they?

It is not that Christ here forbids us to love those who love us, but rather that He is condemning a merely carnal love: for one man to love another simply because he is loved by the other is nothing else than a man loving himself in another. In order to love our neighbour rightly and in a manner acceptable to the Lord, we must heed the following rule: all the Commandments of the second table must be obeyed from the same principle as those in the first table, namely, *love to God*. Parents are to be honoured in God and for God, "children obey your parents in *the Lord*" (Eph. 6:1), and my neighbour must be loved in God and for God, even though he be my enemy. Why? Because he is as truly God's

God's creature as I am, and because God has commanded me to love him. That must be the ground of our obedience, though from other respects our love may increase for our neighbour.

"For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?" In this question Christ emphasizes a principle which it is our wisdom to heed in the ordering of our lives, namely, that we give ourselves especially to the doing of those things to which is attached the promise of God's reward. To make this the more forcible and impressive let us ask, What was it that moved Moses to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, which caused him to forsake the treasures of Egypt and to suffer affliction with the people of God? The Holy Spirit has told us: it was because he had "respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:25, 26). But how little is this truth believed in and the principle acted on today, or why so much trifling away of our time? What reward can they look for at God's hand who give themselves up to "the pleasures of sin?"

"And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans the same?" (Matt. 5:47). Christ's drift in these words is the same as in the previous verse, the design of such repetition being that this weighty truth may be fixed the more firmly and deeply in our minds. We are so slow in performing the duties of love, particularly unto our *enemies*, that the duty of it needs to be pressed upon us again and again. If He who spake as never man spake saw well to frequently repeat Himself, His underservants need not hesitate to do the same. Not only are we to pray for those who hate and injure us, but we are to greet them when they cross our path. How wrong then to deliberately pass a brother on the street and treat him as though he were an utter stranger to us! Nor do the words, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 10) militate to the slightest degree against what has just been said. It is personal or private enemies that Christ had in view, whereas 2 John 10 refers to those who are the open enemies of *God*.

"What do ye more than others?" What a searching question is this! And note well the precise form of it. It is not, "What *know* ye more than others" nor, "what *profess* ye more than others?" or even, "what *believe* ye more than others?" but "what *DO* ye more than others?" Yet care must be taken that this inquiry be not perverted. If on the one hand it is of first importance that the Gospel trumpet give forth no uncertain sound when proclaiming the cardinal truth of justification by faith, yet it is equally essential to make it plain that saving faith always identifies itself by the works which it produces. Justification before God is by faith alone, but it is not a faith which remains alone. Saving faith is not a lifeless, inoperative and sterile thing, but a living, active, fruit-producing principle. And it is by the fruit which a saving faith produces that it is distinguished from the worthless and unproductive faith of the empty professor.

Saving faith is the gift of God. It is a supernatural principle inwrought by the Holy Spirit at the new birth. And this faith is evidenced by its fruits. It is a faith which "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). It is a faith that "purifieth the heart" (Acts 15:9). It is a faith that "overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4). And since those who are the favoured subjects of this faith *have* more than others, they *ought* to do more, they *can* do more, yea they *will* do more than the unregenerate. The thing which above all others has brought the Cause of Christ into such general contempt in the world is because millions of those claiming to be His followers do *not* do more, but often considerably less, than many who make no such profession: they are less truthful, less honest, less unselfish, less benevo-

lent. It is not what we say, but how we conduct ourselves, which most impresses the ungodly.

Christ has good reason to require more from His disciples than He does from the children of the Wicked One. They *profess* more: but unless their profession be supported by facts, and verified by works, then it is a vain and hypocritical one: dishonouring to the Saviour, a stumbling-block to His people, and an occasion of blasphemy to His enemies. They *are* more than others. They are loved with an everlasting love, redeemed at infinite cost, indwelt by the Holy Spirit—then should they not produce more than others? “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” It is certain that Christians *can* do more than others. Said the Apostle, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). A supernatural principle indwells them, the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts, the all-sufficient grace of God is available to them, and all things are possible to him that believeth. “What do ye more than others?” Answer this question in the presence of God.

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). From all that He had said, Christ now drew this excellent consequence, exhorting His followers to perfection in all the duties of love. “Be ye therefore perfect” is the unchanging requirement of the Law, “even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” is the exalted standard which the Gospel presents to us. The moral excellence of the Divine character is the copy and rule set before us, and nothing short of that is to be our sincere, ardent and constant endeavour. Though such an aim is never fully realized in this life, yet we must say with Paul, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). In view of such a confession by the eminent Apostle, how baseless and absurd is the pretension of those claiming to have already reached sinless perfection. The fact is that the closer we walk with God, the more will it work in us self-abasement and humiliation and not self-complacency and pride.—A.W.P.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

### 5. *By the Brook.*

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (1 Kings 17:2, 3). As pointed out last month, it was not merely to provide Elijah with a safe retreat, to protect His servant from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, that Jehovah so commanded the Prophet, but to signify His sore displeasure against His apostate people: the withdrawal of the Prophet from the scene of public action was an additional judgment on the Nation. We cannot forbear pointing out that tragic analogy which now obtains more or less in Christendom. During the past two or three decades God has removed some eminent and faithful servants of His by the hand of death, and not only has He not replaced them by raising up others in their stead, but an increasing number of those which still remain are being sent into seclusion by Him.

It was both for God’s glory and the Prophet’s own good that the Lord bade him “get thee hence . . . hide thyself.” It was a call to separation. Ahab was an apostate, and his consort was a heathen. Idolatry abounded on every side. Jehovah was publicly dishonoured. The man of God could have no sympathy or communion with such a horrible situation. Isolation from evil is absolutely essential if we are to “keep ourselves unspotted from the world” (James 1:27): not only separation from secular wickedness but from religious corruption also. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11) has been God’s demand in every dispensation. Elijah stood as the Lord’s faithful witness in a day of national departure from Himself, and having delivered His testimony to the responsible head, the Prophet must now retire. To turn our backs on all that dishonours God is an essential duty.

But where was Elijah to go? He had previously dwelt in the presence of the Lord God of Israel, “before whom I stand” he could say when pronouncing sentence of judgment unto Ahab, and he should still abide in the secret place of the Most High. The Prophet was not left to his own devisings or choice, but directed to a place of God’s own appointing—*outside the camp*, away from the entire religious system. Degenerate Israel was to know him only as a witness against themselves: he was to have no place and take no part in either the social or religious life of the Nation. He was to turn “eastward”: the quarter from which the morning light arises, for those who are regulated by the Divine precepts “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). “By the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.” Jordan marked the very limits of the land. Typically it spoke of death, and spiritual death now rested upon Israel.

But what a message of hope and comfort the “Jordan” contained for one who was walking with the Lord! How well calculated was it to speak unto the heart of one whose faith was in a healthy condition! Was it not at this very place that Jehovah had shown Himself strong on behalf of His people in the days of Joshua? Was not the Jordan the very scene which had witnessed the miracle-working power of God at the time when Israel left the Wilderness behind them? It was there the Lord had said unto Joshua, “This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Josh. 3:7). It was there that “the living God” (v. 10) made the waters to “stand upon a heap” (v. 13), so that “all the Israelites passed over on dry ground” (v. 17). Such are the things which should, and no doubt did, fill the mind of the Tishbite when his Master ordered him to this very place. If his faith was in

exercise, his heart would be in perfect peace, knowing that a miracle-working God would not fail him there.

It was also for the Prophet's own personal good that the Lord now bade him, "hide thyself." He was in danger from another quarter than the fury of Ahab. The success of his supplications might prove a snare: tending to fill his heart with pride, and even to harden him against the calamity then desolating the land. Previously he had been engaged in secret prayer, and then for a brief moment he had witnessed a good confession before the king. The future held for him yet more honourable service, for the day was to come when he should witness for God not only in the presence of Ahab, but he should discomfort and utterly rout the assembled hosts of Baal and, in measure at least, turn the wandering Nation back again unto the God of their fathers. But the time for that was not ripe; neither was Elijah himself.

The Prophet needed further training in secret if he were to be personally fitted to speak again for God in public. Ah, my reader, the man whom the Lord uses has to be kept low: severe discipline has to be experienced by him, if the flesh is to be duly mortified. Three more years must be spent by the Prophet in seclusion. How humbling! Alas, how little is man to be trusted: how little is he able to bear being put into the place of honour! How quickly self rises to the surface, and the instrument is ready to believe he is something more than an instrument. How sadly easy it is to make of the very service God entrusts us with a pedestal on which to display ourselves. But God will not share His glory with another, and therefore does He "hide" those who may be tempted to take some of it unto themselves. It is only by retiring from the public view and getting alone with God that we can learn our own nothingness.

We see this important lesson brought out very plainly in Christ's dealings with His beloved Apostles. On one occasion they returned to Him flushed with success and full of themselves: they "told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught" (Mark 6:30). Most instructive is His quiet response: "And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while" (v. 31). This is still His gracious remedy for any of His servants who may be puffed up with their own importance, and imagine that His Cause upon earth would suffer a severe loss, if *they* were removed from it. God often says to His servants, "Get thee hence . . . hide thyself": sometimes it is by the dashing of their ministerial hopes, sometimes by a bed of affliction or by a severe bereavement, the Divine purpose is accomplished. Happy the one who can then say from his heart, "The will of the Lord be done."

Every servant that God deigns to use must pass through the trying experience of Cherith before he is ready for the triumph of Carmel. This is an unchanging principle in the ways of God. Joseph suffered the indignities of both the pit and the prison before he became governor of all Egypt, second only to the king himself. Moses spent one third of his long life at "the backside of the desert" before Jehovah gave him the honour of leading His people out of the house of bondage. David had to learn the sufficiency of God's power on the farm before he went forth and slew Goliath in the sight of the assembled armies of Israel and the Philistines. Thus it was, too, with the perfect Servant: 30 years of seclusion and silence before He began His brief public ministry. So, too, with the chief of His ambassadors: a season in the solitudes of Arabia was his apprenticeship before he became the Apostle to the Gentiles.

But is there not yet another angle from which we may contemplate this seemingly strange order, “Get thee hence . . . hide thyself”? Was it not a very real and severe testing of the Prophet’s *submissiveness* unto the Divine will? “Severe,” we say, for to a robust man this request was much more exacting than his appearing before Ahab: one with a zealous disposition would find it much harder to spend three years in inactive seclusion than to be engaged in public service. This writer can testify from long and painful experience that to be removed “into a corner” (Isa. 30:20) is a much severer trial than to address large congregations every night month after month. In the case of Elijah this lesson is obvious: he must learn to personally render implicit obedience unto the Lord before he was qualified to command others in His name.

Let us now take a closer look at the particular *place* selected by God as the one where His servant was next to sojourn: “by the brook Cherith.” Ah, it was a brook and not a river—a brook which might dry up any moment. It is rare that God places His servants, or even His people, in the midst of luxury and abundance: to be surfeited with the things of this world only too often means the drawing away of the affections from the Giver Himself. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” It is our *hearts* God requires, and very often this is put to the proof. The way in which temporal losses are borne generally makes manifest the difference between the real Christian and the worldling. The latter is utterly cast down by financial reverses, and frequently commits suicide. Why? Because his *all* has gone and there is nothing left to live for. Contrastively, the genuine believer may be severely shaken and for a time deeply depressed, but he will recover his poise and say, God is still my portion and “I shall not want.”

Instead of a river God often gives us a brook, which may be running today and dried up tomorrow. Why? To teach us not to rest in our blessings, but in the Blessor Himself. Yet is it not at this very point that we so often fail—our hearts being far more occupied with the gifts than with the Giver? Is not this just the reason why the Lord will not trust us with a river?—because it would unconsciously take His place in our hearts. “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; *then* he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (Deut. 32:15). And the same evil tendency exists within us, We sometimes feel that we are being harshly dealt with because God gives us a brook rather than a river, but this is because we are so little acquainted with our own hearts. God loves His own too well to place dangerous knives in the hands of infants.

And how was the Prophet to subsist in such a place? Where was his food to come from? Ah, God will see after that: He will provide for his maintenance: “And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook” (1 Kings 17:4). This God undertook for. Whatever may be the case with Ahab and his idolaters, Elijah shall not perish. In the very worst of times God will show Himself strong on the behalf of His own. Whoever starves they shall be fed: “Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure” (Isa. 33:16). Yet how absurd it sounds to common sense to bid a man tarry indefinitely by a brook! Yes, but it was God who had given this order, and the Divine commands are not to be argued about but obeyed. Thereby Elijah was bidden to trust God contrary to sight, to reason, to all outward appearances, to rest in the Lord Himself and wait patiently for Him.

“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*” (1 Kings 17:4). Observe the word we have placed in italics. The Prophet might have preferred many another hiding-place, but to Cherith he must go if he were to receive the Divine supplies: as long as he tarried

there, God was pledged to provide for him. How important, then, is the question, Am I in the place which God has (by His Word or providence) assigned me? If so, He will assuredly supply my every need. But, if like the younger son, I turn my back upon Him and journey into the far country, then like that prodigal I shall certainly suffer want. How many a servant of God has laboured in some lowly or difficult sphere and the dew of the Spirit was on his soul and the blessing of Heaven on his ministry, when there came an invitation from some other field which seemed to offer a wider scope (and a larger salary!) and yielding to the temptation, the Spirit was grieved and his usefulness in God's kingdom was at an end.

The same principle applies with equal force to the rank and file of God's people: they must be "in the way" (Gen. 24:27) of God's appointing if they are to receive Divine supplies. "Thy will be done" precedes "Give us this day our daily bread." How many professing Christians have we personally known who resided in a town where God sent one of His own qualified servants, who fed them with "the finest of the wheat" and their souls prospered. Then came a tempting business offer from some distant place, which would improve their position in the world. The offer is accepted, their tent was removed, only to enter a spiritual wilderness where there was no edifying ministry available. In consequence their souls were starved, their testimony for Christ ruined, and a period of fruitless backsliding ensued. As Israel had to follow the Cloud of old in order to obtain supplies of manna, so must we be in the place of God's ordering if our souls are to be watered and our spiritual lives prospered.

Let us next view *the instruments* selected by God to minister unto the bodily needs of His servant. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee." Various lines of thought are hereby suggested. First, see here both the high sovereignty and the absolute supremacy of God; His sovereignty in the choice made, His supremacy in His power to make it good. He is a law unto Himself: "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in Heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa. 135:6). He prohibited His people from eating ravens, classifying them among the unclean, yea, to be "an abomination" to them (Lev. 11:15; Deut. 14:14). Yet He Himself made use of them to carry food unto His servant. How different are God's ways from ours! He employed Pharaoh's own daughter to succour the infant Moses and a Balaam to utter one of His most remarkable prophecies. He used the jaw-bone of an ass in the hand of Samson to slay the Philistines, and a sling and stone to vanquish their champion.

"I have commanded the ravens to feed thee." O what a God is ours! The fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, the wild beasts of the field, yea, the very winds and waves obey Him. Yes, "Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power . . . Behold, I will do a new thing: now it shall spring forth, shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert. The beasts of the field shall honour Me, the dragons and the owls (yes, and the ravens, too): because I give waters in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people" (Isa. 43:16-20). Thus the Lord caused birds of prey, which lived on carrion, to feed the Prophet.

But let us also admire here the wisdom as well as the power of God. Elijah's fare was provided for partly in a natural and partly in a supernatural way. There was water in the brook, so he could easily go and fetch it. God will work no miracles to spare a man trouble, or that he should be listless and lazy, making no effort to procure his own suste-

nance. But there was no food in the desert: how is he to get that? God will furnish this in a miraculous manner. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee." Had human beings been used to take him food, they might have divulged his hiding-place. Had a dog or some domestic animal gone each morning and evening, people might have seen this regular journeying to and fro, carrying food, and so been curious, and investigated the same. But *birds* flying with flesh into the desert would arouse no suspicion: it would be concluded they were taking it to their young. See, then, how careful God is of His people, how judicious in the arrangements He makes for them. He knows what would endanger their safety and provides accordingly.

"Hide thyself by the brook Cherith . . . I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Go immediately, without entertaining any doubts, without making any hesitation. However contrary to their natural instincts, these birds of prey shall obey the Divine behest. Nor need this appear the least unlikely. God Himself created them, gave them their peculiar instinct, and He knows how to direct and control the same. He has power to suspend or check it, according to His good pleasure. Nature is exactly what God made it, and entirely dependent upon Him for its continuance. He upholds all things by the word of His power. In Him and by Him the birds and beasts, as well as man, live, move, and have their being; and therefore He can whenever He thinks fit, either suspend or alter the law which He has imposed upon any of His creatures. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead" (Acts 26:8)!

There in his lowly retreat the Prophet was called upon to sojourn many days, yet not without a precious promise guaranteeing his sustenance: the supplying him with needed provision was Divinely assured him. The Lord would take care of His servant while hid from public view, and would daily feed him by His miracle-working power. Nevertheless, it was a real testing of Elijah's *faith*. Whoever heard of such instruments being employed—birds of prey bringing food in a time of famine! Could the ravens be depended upon? Was it not far more likely that they would devour the food themselves than bring it to the Prophet? Ah, his trust was not to be in the birds, but in the sure word of Him that cannot lie: "I have commanded the ravens." It was the Creator and not the creature, the Lord Himself and not the instruments, Elijah's heart was to be fixed upon. How blessed to be lifted above "circumstances" and in the inerrent promise of God have a sure proof of His care.—A.W.P.

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

### 3. *Its Nature.*

The doctrine we are now considering is a most solemn and forbidding one. Certainly it is one which could never have been invented by man, for it is far too humbling and distasteful. It is one which is most offensive to human pride, and at complete variance with the modern idea of the progress of the human race. Nevertheless, if we accept the Scriptures as a Divine revelation then we have no choice in the matter but to uncomplainingly receive this Truth. The ruined and helpless state of the sinner is fully testified to by the Bible: therein fallen man is represented as so utterly carnal and sold under sin as to be not only "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), but as lacking the least inclination to move toward God. Very dark indeed is this side of the Truth, but its supplement is the glory of God in rich grace, for it furnishes a real but necessary background to the blessed contents of the Gospel.

In the Scriptures it is plainly taught that man is a fallen being, that he is lost (Luke 19:10), that he cannot recover himself from his ruin; that despite the fact of an all-sufficient Saviour presented to sinners, none of them can avail themselves of Him until they be Divinely regenerated (John 3:3, 5). Thus it is quite evident that if any sinner be saved, he owes his salvation entirely to the free grace and effectual power of God, and not in anyway unto any good in or from or by himself. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy" (Psa. 115:1) is the unqualified acknowledgement of all the redeemed. Scripture speaks in no uncertain language on this point. If one man differs from another on this all-important matter of being saved, then it is God who has made him to differ (1 Cor. 4:7) and not himself.

Nor is the sinner's salvation to be in anyway attributed to either pliability of heart or to his diligence in the use of means. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" and "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy" (Rom. 9:16, 18). If the reader will consult the context of John 6:44 he will find that our Lord was there accounting for the enmity of the murmuring Jews, saying, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." By those words Christ intimated that, considering what fallen human nature is, the conduct of His enemies is not to be wondered at, that they acted no different than will all other men when left to themselves. His own disciples would never have obeyed and followed Him had not a gracious Divine influence been exercised upon them, which was not granted unto their fellow creatures.

But as soon as this flesh-withering truth be pressed upon the unregenerate, they at once raise an outcry and voice their objections against it. If the spiritual condition of fallen man be one of complete helplessness, then with what sincerity can the Gospel bid him turn from his sins and flee to Christ for refuge? If the natural man be unable to repent and believe the Gospel, then how can he be justly punished for his impenitence and unbelief? On what ground can man be blamed for not doing what is morally impossible? Notwithstanding these difficulties, the point of doctrine which we shall insist upon is that none are able to comply with the terms of the Gospel until they are made the subjects of the special and effectual grace of God, that is, until they are Divinely quickened, made willing in the day of His power, so that they actually *do* comply with its terms.

Nevertheless, we shall also endeavour to show that sinners are not unjustly condemned for their depravity, but that their inability is a criminal one. Great care needs to

be taken in stating this doctrine accurately, or otherwise men will be encouraged to put it to an evil use, making it a comfortable resting-place for their corrupt hearts. By a misrepresentation of it more than one preacher has “sewn pillows to all armholes” thereby “strengthening the hands of the wicked that he should not return from his wicked way” (Ezek. 13:18, 22). The truth of man’s spiritual impotency has been so distorted that many sinners have been made to feel they are to be pitied, and to imagine they are sincere in desiring a new heart—which has not yet been granted them. While excusing their helplessness many suppose this to be quite consistent with a genuine longing to be renewed. It is the bounden duty of the minister to make his hearers realize they are under no inability save the excuseless corruption of their own hearts.

It will therefore be apparent that there is a real need for us to enquire closely into the precise *nature* of man’s spiritual inability, as to *why* it is he cannot come unto Christ unless he be Divinely drawn. But before commencing this task we will notice some of the efforts made by others therein, those who have erred thereon, repudiating or perverting the truth. Theologians have divided these errorists into two main classes: Pelagians and Semipelagians—Pelagius being the principal opponent of the godly Augustine in the fifth century. Romanists, the more extreme “Holiness” sects, and the Salvation Army are Pelagians in their teaching respecting the effects of the Fall and the nature of human depravity.

A. A. Hodge in his “Outlines of Theology” has succinctly summarized the Pelagian dogmas on the subject of man’s ability to fulfil the Law of God. (1) Moral character can be predicated only of volitions. (2) Ability is always the measure of responsibility. (3) Hence every man has always plenary power to do all that it is his duty to do. (4) Hence the human will alone, to the exclusion of the interference of any internal influence from God, must decide human character and destiny. The only Divine influence needed by man or consistent with his character as a self-determined agent is an external, providential, and educational one.

So, too, Semipelagians. (1) Man’s nature has been so far weakened by the Fall that it cannot act aright in spiritual matters without Divine assistance. (2) This weakened moral state which infants inherit from their parents is the cause of sin, but not itself sin in the sense of deserving the wrath of God. (3) Man must strive to do his whole duty, when God meets him with cooperative grace, and renders his efforts successful. (4) Man is not responsible for the sins he commits until after he has enjoyed and abused the influences of grace.

Arminians are Semipelagians, many of them going the whole length of the Romish error in affirming the freedom unto good of fallen man’s will. But their principal contention may fairly be stated thus: Man has certainly suffered considerably from the Fall, so much so that sinners are unable to do much, if anything, toward their salvation, merely of themselves. Nevertheless, say the Arminians, sinners are able, by the help of common grace (supposed to be extended by the Spirit to all who hear the Gospel) to do those things which are regarded as fulfilling the preliminary conditions of salvation (such as acknowledging their sins and calling upon God for help to forsake them and turn unto Christ). And it is further affirmed that if sinners will thus pray, use the means of grace, and put forth what power they do have, then assuredly God will meet them half way and renew their hearts and pardon their iniquities.

Against this Arminian parody it is to be objected. First, that so far from the Scriptures representing man as being partially disabled by the Fall, it declares him to be *completely* ruined: not merely weakened, but “without strength” (Rom. 5:6). Second, to affirm that the natural man has any aspiration after God, is to deny he is totally depraved or that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5, cf. 8:21), for “there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). Third, if it were true that God could not justly condemn sinners for their inability to comply with the terms of the Gospel, and that in order to give every man a “fair chance” to be saved He extends to all the common help of His Spirit, that would not be “grace,” but a *debt* which He owed to His creatures. Finally, if such a God-insulting principle were granted, then the conclusion would inevitably follow that those who took advantage of this “common grace” could lawfully boast that they made themselves to differ from those who did not.

But enough of these wretched shifts and subterfuges of the carnal mind. Let us now turn to God’s own Word and see what it teaches us concerning the nature of man’s spiritual impotency. First, it represents it as being a *penal* one, a judicial infliction from the righteous Judge of all the earth. Unless this be clearly grasped at the outset we are left without any adequate explanation of this dark mystery. God did not create man as he now is. God made man holy and upright, and by his own apostasy he became corrupt and wicked. The Creator originally endowed man with certain powers, placed him on probation, and prescribed to him a rule of conduct. Had our first parents preserved their integrity, had they remained in loving and loyal subjection to their Maker and Ruler, all had been well: not only for themselves, but also for their posterity. But they were not willing to remain in the place of subjection: they took the reins into their own hands, rebelling against their Governor, and dreadful was the outcome.

How greatly was the sin of man aggravated. It was committed against knowledge and, through the beneficence of the One against whom it was directed, under great advantages. It was committed against Divine warning, and against an explicit declaration of the consequence of his transgression. In Adam’s fearful offense there was unbelief, presumption, base ingratitude, fearful rebellion against his most righteous and gracious Maker. Let the dreadfulness of this first human sin be carefully weighed before we are tempted to murmur against the dire consequences which attended it. Those dire consequences may all be summed up in that one fearful word “*death*,” for “the wages of sin is *death*”—the full import of which can best be ascertained by considering all the evil effects which have since befallen man. A just, holy, and sin-hating God caused the punishment to fit the crime.

Now let it be carefully understood that when God placed Adam upon probation it pleased Him to place the whole human race on probation, for Adam’s posterity were not only in him seminally as their natural head, but they were also in him legally and morally as their legal and moral head. In other words, by Divine constitution and covenant Adam stood and acted as the federal representative of the whole human race. Consequently, when he sinned, *we* sinned; when he fell, we fell. God justly imputed Adam’s transgression to all his descendants, whose agent he was: “By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom. 5:18). By his sin Adam became not only guilty but corrupt, and that defilement of nature is transmitted to all his children. “Adam’s sin corrupted man’s nature and leavened the whole lump of mankind. We putrefied in Adam as

our root. The root was poisoned, and so the branches were envenomed" (Thomas Boston).

"Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Let us repeat, that Adam was not only the father, but the federal representative of his posterity; consequently justice required that they should be dealt with as sharing in his guilt, and therefore that the same punishment should be inflicted upon them, which is exactly what this vitally-important passage in Romans 5:12-21 affirms. "By one man (acting on behalf of the many), sin entered (as a foreign element, as a hostile factor) into the world (the whole system over which Adam had been placed as the vicegerent of God: blasting the fair face of nature, bringing a curse upon the earth, ruining all humanity), and death by sin (as its appointed wages), and so death passed upon (as the sentence of the righteous judge) all men" (because all men were seminally and federally in Adam).

It needs to be carefully borne in mind that in connection with the penal infliction which came upon man at the Fall, he lost no moral or spiritual faculty, but rather *the power to use them aright*. In Scripture "death" (as the wages of sin) signifies not annihilation, but *separation*. As physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, so spiritual death is the separation of the soul from its Maker: as Ephesians 4:18 expresses it, "alienated from the life of God." Thus, when the Father said, of the prodigal, "this My son was dead" (Luke 15), He meant, this My son was absent from Me—away in the "far country." Hence, when, as the Substitute of His people, Christ was receiving in their stead the wages which was due them, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou *for-saken* Me?" This is why the Lake of Fire is called "the Second Death," because those cast therein are "punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*" (2 Thess. 1:9).

Above we have said that all of Adam's posterity shared in the guilt of the great transgression committed by their federal head, and that therefore the same punishment is inflicted upon them as upon him. That punishment consisted (so far as its present character is concerned) in his coming under the curse and wrath of God, the corrupting of his nature, and the mortalizing of his body. Clear proof of this is found in that inspired statement, "And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his *own likeness*, after his image" (Gen. 5:3), which is in direct antithesis from his being created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). That Adam's first son was morally depraved, his conduct clearly evidenced; and that his second son was so also, the sacrifice which he brought to God fully acknowledged.

As the result of the Fall, man is born into this world so totally depraved in his moral nature as to be entirely unable to do anything spiritually good, or even in the slightest degree dispose himself thereto. Even under the exciting and persuasive influences of Divine grace the will of man is completely unfit to act aright in co-operation with grace, until after the will itself is, by the power of God, radically and permanently renewed. The tree itself must be made good, before there is the least prospect of any good fruit being borne by it. Even after a man is regenerated, the renewed will ever continues dependent upon Divine grace to energize, direct and enable it unto the performance of anything acceptable to God, as the language of Christ clearly shows: "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

But let it be clearly understood that though man has by the Fall lost all power to do anything pleasing to God, yet his Maker has not lost His authority over him nor forfeited His right to require that which is due Himself. As creatures we were bound to serve God and do whatsoever He commanded, and the fact that we have, by our own folly and sin, thrown away the strength given to us, cannot and does not cancel our obligations. Has the creditor no right to demand payment for what is owed him because the debtor has squandered his substance, and is unable to pay him? If God can require of us no more than we are now able to render Him, then the more we enslave ourselves by evil habits and still further incapacitate ourselves, the less our liabilities—and so the deeper we plunge into sin, the less wicked we would become, which is a manifest absurdity.

Even though it be by Adam's fall that we have become depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, yet the terrible fact that we are enemies to the infinitely-glorious God, our Maker, renders us infinitely to blame and without the vestige of a legitimate excuse. Surely it is perfectly obvious that nothing can make it right for a creature to voluntarily rise up at enmity against One who is the sum of all excellence, infinitely worthy of our love, homage, and obedience. Thus, for man—whatever be the origin of his depravity—to be a rebel against the Governor of this world is infinitely evil and culpable. It is utterly vain for us to seek to shelter behind Adam's offense while every sin we commit is *voluntary* and not compulsory—the free, spontaneous inclinations of our hearts. This being the case every month will be stopped, and all the world stand guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

To this it may be objected that Paul himself argued that he was not personally and properly to blame for the corruptions of his heart, saying, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:17, 20). But there is no justification for so wickedly perverting the Apostle's language in that passage. If the scope of his words there be attended to, such a misuse of them is at once ruled out of court. He was engaged in showing that Divine grace and not indwelling sin was the governing principle within him—as he had affirmed in, "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (6:14). So far from insinuating that he did not feel himself to be to blame, wholly to blame, for his remaining corruptions, he (in this very chapter) declares, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14), and at the close cries as a broken-hearted penitent, "O wretched man that I am" (v. 24). It is perfectly obvious that he could not have *mourned* for his remaining corruptions as being sinful if he had not felt himself to *blame* for them.—A.W.P.

### A MUTUAL COMPLAINT.

“Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness: as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle” (Job 29:2-4). If Job here refers to the temporal prosperity which he had lost, we cannot condemn him for his complaint, neither can we commend him. It is but the expression of a natural regret, which would be felt by any man who had experienced such great reverses. But there is everywhere in the expressions which he used such a strain of spirituality, that we are inclined to believe he had more reference to the condition of his heart than to his earthly affairs. His soul was depressed: he had lost the light of God’s countenance: his inward comforts were declining. his joy in the Lord was at a low ebb; this he regretted far more than anything besides.

No doubt he deplored the departure of those prosperous days when, as he words it, his roots were spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch; but much more did he bemoan that the lamp of the Lord no more shone upon his head, and the secret of God was not upon his tabernacle. As his spiritual regrets are far more instructive to us than his natural ones, we will turn all our attention to them. We may, without violence, appropriate Job’s words to ourselves: for I fear that many of us can with great propriety take up our wailing and mourn for the days of our espousals, the happy days of our first love.

First, regrets such as those expressed in our text may and ought to be very *bitter*. If it be the loss of spiritual things that we regret, then may we say from the bottom of our hearts, “Oh that I were as in months past.” It is a great thing for a man to be near to God; it is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion, and to become God’s familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light. The poor man who was always poor is scarcely poor—but he who has fallen from the summit of greatness into the depths of poverty is poor indeed. The man who has never enjoyed communion with God knows nothing of what it must be to lose it; but he who has once been pressed upon the Saviour’s bosom will mourn as long as he lives, if he is deprived of the sacred enjoyment.

The mercies which Job deplored in our text are no little ones. First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of Divine *preservation*. He says, “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me.” There are days with Christians when they can see God’s hand all around them, checking them in the first approaches of sin, and setting a hedge about all their ways. Their conscience is tender, and the Spirit of God is obeyed by them; they are, therefore, kept in all their ways, the angels of God watching over them, lest they dash their foot against a stone. But when they fall into laxity of spirit and walk at a distance from God, they are not so preserved. Though kept from final and total apostasy, yet they are not kept from very grievous sin; for, like Peter who followed afar off, they may be left to deny their Master, even with oaths and cursings. If we have lost that conscious preservation of God, which once covered us from every fiery dart; if we no longer abide under the shadow of the Almighty; and feel no longer that His Truth is our shield and buckler, we have lost a joy worth worlds, and we may well deplore it with anguish of heart.

Job had also lost Divine *consolation*, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head, when the sun of God's love was as it were in the zenith, and cast no shadow; when he rejoiced without ceasing, and triumphed from morning to night in the God of his salvation. The joy of the Lord is our strength, the joy of the Lord is Israel's excellence; it is Heaven upon earth, and consequently, to lose it, is a calamity indeed. Who that has once been satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord, will be content to go into the dry and thirsty land, and live far off from God? Will he not rather cry out with David, "My soul thirsteth for God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Surely his agonizing prayer will be, "Restore unto me the *joy* of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit." Love to God will never be content if His face be hidden. Until the curtain be drawn aside and the King's face be seen through the lattices, the true spouse will spend her life in sighing: mourning like a dove bereaved of its mate.

Moreover, Job deplored the loss of Divine *illumination*. "By His light," he says, "I walked through darkness," that is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity: God shed such a light upon the mysteries of providence, that where others missed their path, Job, made wise by Heaven, could find it. There have been times when, to our patient faith, all things have been plain. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). But if we walk far off from God, then, straightway, even the precious truth of God is no more clear to us, and the dealings of God with us in providence appear to be like a maze. He is as wise as Solomon who walks with God, but he is a very fool who trusts his own understanding. All the wisdom that we have gathered by observation and experience will not supply us with sufficiency of common sense if we turn away from God. Israel, without consulting God, made a league with her enemies: she thought the case most plain when she entered into hasty alliance with the Gibeonites, but she was duped by cunning because she asked not counsel of the Lord. In the simplest business we shall err, if we seek not direction from the Lord; yet where matters are most complicated, we shall walk wisely, if we wait for a voice from the Oracle and seek the good Shepherd's guidance. We may bitterly lament, therefore, if we have lost the Holy Spirit's light. If now the Lord answers us not, neither by His Word nor by His providence, if we wander alone, saying, "O that I knew where I might find Him," we are in an evil case.

Moreover Job had lost Divine *communion*: so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle. Who shall tell to another what the secret of God is? Believing hearts know it, but they cannot frame to pronounce aright the words that could explain it, nor can they convey by language what the secret is. The Lord manifests Himself unto His people as He does not unto the world. We could not tell the love passages that there are between believers and their Lord—even when they are set to such sweet music as the Song of Solomon, carnal minds cannot discern their delights. They cannot plow with our heifer, and therefore they read not our riddle. As Paul in Heaven saw things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, so the believer sees things and enjoys in communion with Christ what it would not be lawful but impossible for him to tell to carnal men. Such pearls are not for swine. The spiritual discerns all things, but he himself is discerned of no man.

Now it is a high privilege, beyond all privileges, to enter into familiar intercourse with the Most High, and the man who has once possessed it, and has lost it, has a bitterer

cause for regret than if, being rich, he had lost his wealth; or being famous, he had lost esteem; or being in health, he were suddenly brought to the bed of languishing. "No loss can equal the loss of Thee, my God. No eclipse is so black as the hiding of Thy face. No storm is so fierce as the letting forth of Thine indignation. It is a grief upon grief to find that Thou are not with me as in the days of old." Whenever, then, these regrets do exist, if men's hearts are as they should be, they are not mere hypocritical or superficial expressions, but they express the bitterest experiences of our human existence. "Oh that I were as in months past" is no sentimental sigh, but the voice of the innermost spirit in anguish as one who has lost his firstborn.

Secondly, but let me remind you that these regrets are not *inevitable*: that is to say, it is not absolutely necessary that a Christian should ever feel them, or be compelled to express them. It has grown to be a tradition among us, that every Christian must backslide in a measure and that growth in grace cannot be unbrokenly sustained. It is regarded by many as a law of nature that our first love must grow cold, and our early zeal must necessarily decline. I do not believe it for a moment. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and were we watchful and careful to be near to God, there is no reason why our spiritual life should not continuously make progress both in strength and beauty. There is no inherent necessity in the Divine life itself compelling it to decline, for is it not written, "it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life," "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"?

Grace is a living and incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, and there is nowhere impressed upon the Divine life a law of sinning and decay. If we do falter and faint in the onward path, it is *our* sin, and it is doubly sinful to forge excuses for it. It is not to be laid upon the back of some mysterious necessity of the new nature that it should be so, but it is brought as a charge against ourselves. Nor do outward circumstances ever furnish a justification to us if we decline in grace; for under the worst conditions believers have grown in grace; deprived of the joys of Christian fellowship and denied the comforts of the public means of grace, believers have nevertheless been known to attain to a high degree of likeness to Christ Jesus. Thrown into the midst of wicked companions and forced to hear, like righteous Lot, the filthy conversation of the ungodly, yet Christians have shone all the brighter for the surrounding darkness, and have been able to escape from a wicked and perverse generation. Certain it is that a man may be an eminent Christian and be among the poorest of the poor: poverty need not make us depart from God; and it is equally certain that a man may be rich and for all that walk with God and be distinguished for great grace. There is no lawful position of which we may say, "it compels a man to decline in grace."

And, brethren, there is no period of our life in which it is necessary for us to go back. The young Christian, with all the strength of his animal passions, can by grace be strong and overcome the Wicked One. The Christian in middle life, surrounded with the world's cares, can prove that "this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith." The man immersed in business may still be baptized of the Holy Spirit. Assuredly old age offers no excuse for decline: "they shall bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright." No, brethren, as Christ said to His disciples, when they would feign have sent the multitude away to buy meat, "they need not depart," so would He say to the whole company of His people, "ye need not depart"—

there is no compulsion for decline in grace. Your sun need not stand still, your moon need not wane. If you cannot add a cubit to your spiritual stature, at any rate, it need not decrease. There are no reasons written in the book of your spiritual nature why you, as a believer, should lose fellowship with God, and if you do so, take blame and shame to yourself, but do not ascribe it to *necessity*. Do not gratify your corruptions by supposing that they are licensed to prevail occasionally, neither vex your graces by conceiving that they are doomed to inevitable defeat at a certain season. The spirit that is in us lusts to evil, but the Holy Spirit is able to subdue it, and will subdue it if we yield ourselves to Him.

Thirdly, the regrets expressed in our text are exceedingly *common*, and it is only here and there that we meet with a believer who has not cause to use them. It ought not to be so, but it is so. How grievously often will the pastor hear this among other bleating of the sheep: "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me."

"What peaceful hours I then enjoyed,  
How sweet their memory still;  
But they have left an aching void,  
The World can never fill."

The commonness of this lamentation may be somewhat accounted for by the universal tendency to undervalue the present and exaggerate the excellence of the past. Have you ever noticed this in natural things? We are prone to cast a partial eye upon some imaginary "good old times." It is gone, and therefore it was good; it is here, and therefore it is dubious. In the middle of the summer we feel that the heat is so relaxing, that a frost would be the most delightful thing conceivable; we love, we say, the bracing air of winter; we are sure it is much healthier for us. Yet usually, when winter arrives, and the extreme cold sets in, we are all most anxious for the advent of spring, and we feel that somehow or other the frost is more trying to us than the heat. I met with an illustration of this tendency the other day. I went down a steep cliff to the sea shore, and during the descent every step tried my weak knees, and I felt that going down hill was the most difficult travelling in the world. Soon I had to return from the sands, and climb the steep path again; and, when I began to pant and puff with the difficult ascent, I changed my opinion, and felt that I would a great deal sooner go down than come up.

Then again, regrets may in some case arise from a holy jealousy. The Christian, in whatever state he is, feels his own imperfection much, and laments his conscious shortcomings. Looking back, he observes with joy the work of grace in his soul, and does not, perhaps so readily recollect the then existing deficiencies of nature; hence he comes to think that the past was better than the present. He is afraid of backsliding, and therefore he jealously fears that he is so; he is so anxious to live nearer to God, so dissatisfied with his present attainments that he dares not believe that he advances, but fears that he has lost ground.

I know this in my own experience, for when lying sick I have frequently lamented that pain has distracted my mind and taken off my attention from the Word of God, and I have longed for those seasons of health when I could read, meditate, and study with pleasure; but now that I have risen up from the sick bed and am growing strong again, I frequently look back to the long nights and quiet days spent in my sick chamber, and think that it was better with me then than now; for now I am apt to be cumbered with much serving, and then I was shut up with God.

Many a man is really strong in Christ; but because he does not feel all the juvenile vivacity of his early days, he fears that spiritual decrepitude has come upon him. He is now far more solid and steadfast, if not so quick and impulsive; but the good man in his holy jealousy marks most the excellence of his juvenile piety, and forgets there were grave deficiencies in it; while in his present state he notes the deficiencies, and fears to hope that he possesses any excellence at all. We are poor judges of our own condition, and usually err on one side or the other. All graces may not flourish at the same time, and de-falcations in one direction may be more than balanced by advantages in another. We may be deeper in humility, if we are not higher in delight. We may not glitter so much, and yet there may be more gold in us. The leaf may not be so green, but the fruit may be more ripe. The way may be rougher, and yet be nearer Heaven. Godly anxiety, then, may be the cause of many regrets which are, nevertheless, not warranted by any serious declension.

And let me add, that very often these regrets of ours about the past are *not wise*. It is impossible to draw a fair comparison between the various stages of Christian experience, so as to give a judicious preference to one above another. Consider, as in a parable, the seasons of the year. There are many persons who, in the midst of the beauties of spring, say, "Ah, but how fitful is the weather. These March winds and April showers come and go by such fits and starts that nothing is to be depended upon. Give me the safer glories of summer." Yet when they feel the heat of summer and wipe the sweat from their brows, they say, "After all, with all the full-blow of beauty around us, we admire more the freshness, verdure, and variety of spring. The snowdrop and the crocus coming forth as the advance-guard of the army of flowers have a superior charm about them." Now it is idle to compare spring with summer: they differ, and each has its own beauty.

We are in autumn now, and very likely instead of prizing the peculiar treasures of autumn, some will despise the peaceful Sabbath of the year, and mournfully compare yon fading leaves to funeral sermons, replete with sadness. Such will contrast summer and autumn, and exalt one above another. Now whoever shall claim precedence for any season shall have me for an opponent. They are all beautiful in their season, and each excels after its kind. Even thus it is wrong to compare the early zeal of the young Christian with the mature and mellow experiences of the older believer, and make preferences. Each is beautiful according to its time. You, dear young friend, with your intense zeal, are to be commended and imitated; but very much of your fire I am afraid arises from novelty, and you are not so strong as you are earnest: like a new-born river you are swift in current, but neither deep nor broad. And you, my more advanced friend, who are much tried and buffeted, to you it is not easy to hold on your way under great inward struggles and severe depressions, but your deeper sense of weakness, your firmer grip of Truth, your more intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His sufferings, your patience and steadfastness are all lovely in the eyes of God. Be thankful, each of you, for what you have, for by the grace of God you are what you are.

After making all these deductions, however, I cannot conceive that they altogether account for the prevalence of these regrets; I am afraid the fact arises from the sad truth that many of us have seriously deteriorated in grace, have decayed in spirit, and degenerated in heart. Alas! in many cases old corruptions have fought desperately, and for awhile caused partial relapse, grace has become weak, and sin has seized the occasion for attack; so that for a time the battle is turned, and Israel's banner is trailed in the mire. With many

professors, I am afraid, prayer is neglected, worldliness is uppermost, sin has come to the front, nature leads the van, and grace and holiness are in the background. It should not be so, but I am afraid, sadly afraid, it is so.

Fourth, since these regrets are exceedingly common, it is to be feared that in some cases they are very sadly *needful*. Now let the blast of the winnowing fan be felt through the congregation. Behold the Lord Himself winnows this heap. Are there not many among us who once walked humbly with God and near to Him, who have fallen into carnal security? Have we not taken it for granted that all is well with us, and are we not settled upon our lees like Moab of old? How little of heart-searching and self-examination are practiced these days! How little inquiry as to whether the root of the matter is really in us! Woe unto those who take their safety for granted, sit down in God's house and say "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion. Of all enemies, one of the most to be dreaded is *presumption*. To be secure in Christ is a blessing; to be secure in ourselves is a curse. Where carnal security reigns, the Spirit of God withdraws. He is seen with the humble and contrite, but He is not with the proud and self-sufficient.—C. H. Spurgeon, 1871.

(Completed in the June Issue).

### STRANGE FIRE.

How much "strange fire" there is in the religious world today, far more so than is generally realized. Fire which has not been authorized by God: fire which has not been kindled by a coal from off His altar: fire which is not sustained by the oil of the Spirit. And therefore is it "*strange* fire." It is the energy of the *flesh* turned into a religious channel: the same energy which moves the enthusiastic amateur-politician to seek votes for his party, only directed to another end. It is the expenditure of earnest zeal, yet a zeal which is not according to knowledge. It is the enthusiasm of youth, prompting them to run without being Divinely sent. It is the engaging in "Christian service" to which God has not called them, for they have no "Thus saith the Lord" to warrant them.

When we turn to the Holy Scriptures we are at once struck by the vivid contrast between that which was ordained of God and that which now obtains so widely in Christendom. Those who are familiar with the contents of the Pentateuch must be impressed with the fullness of instruction which was given to Moses for the ordering of Divine worship and service in Israel. Nothing was unprovided for, nothing was left to the choice of the people. The Lord Himself made known His will and gave commandment accordingly. He appointed those who were to serve, He specified their particular duties, He endowed with wisdom for special tasks. Down to the minutest detail everything was to be carried out as God had bidden. None were to obtrude themselves into any sacred office: none were to usurp authority: none were to undertake duties assigned unto others. Nothing less than *death* awaited those who dared to introduce confusion into the Divine arrangements.

"Thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and *they* shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle setteth forward, *the Levites* shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" (Num. 1:50, 51). Most definite was this Divine injunction, and all who belonged unto the other Tribes must submit thereto, or suffer God's unsparing judgment. No matter how spiritual, how zealous, how devoted to the glory of God, none but the Levites were allowed to have any part in conducting the services of the tabernacle.

This Divine prescription and proscription was repeated again and again. "Thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and *they* shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" (Num. 3:10 and see v. 38). "That no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord" (Num. 16:40). "Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But *the Levites* shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num. 18:22, 23). Nothing could be plainer: all those pertaining not to the Divinely-ordained tribe of Levi were strictly prohibited and debarred from taking any part in the services of God's house. Yet express as these orders were, some in Israel dared to defy the Lord, and in consequence, they paid for their rashness with their lives.

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:1, 2). Mark it well that these men *were* of the tribe of Levi, yet they took upon themselves that which the Lord had not commanded. They

“offered strange fire before the LORD,” that is, fire which He had not appointed (cf. Exo. 31:9), and therefore they were slain before Him. On another occasion we find there was a group in Israel “two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown” led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who strongly resented the Divinely-appointed restriction. “They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3). The sequel was solemn. (vv. 31, 32).

God is very jealous of His appointments and will not suffer them to be defied with impugny. He had given express commandment that, “None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God” (1 Chron. 15:2). But this was ignored by David, for “they set the ark of God upon a new cart . . . and Uzzah and Ahio the sons of Abinadab drave the new cart” (2 Sam. 6:3). “And when they came to Nachon’s threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his rashness” (vv. 6, 7). Later, David owned his fault, saying to the priests, “The Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him *not after the due order*” (1 Chron. 15:13).—A.W.P.

(Completed in the June Issue).

