

Volume 20—Studies in the Scriptures—June, 1941
THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work” (Exo. 20:8-10). This Commandment denotes that God is the sovereign Lord *of our time*, which is to be used and improved by us according as He has here specified. It is to be carefully noted that it consists of *two* parts, each of which bears directly upon the other. “Six days *shalt thou* (not “mayest thou”) labour” is as Divinely binding upon us as “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” It is a precept requiring us diligently to attend unto that vocation and state of life in which the Divine Providence has placed us, to perform its offices with care and conscience. The revealed will of God is that man should work, not idle away his time; that he should work not five days a week (for which “organized labour” has agitated), but six.

He who never works is unfit for worship. Work is to pave the way for worship, as worship is to fit us for work. The fact that any man can escape the observance of this first half of the Commandment is a sad reflection upon our modern social order, and shows how far we have departed from the Divine plan and ideal. The more diligent and faithful we are in performing the duties of the six days, the more shall we value the rest of the seventh. It will thus be seen that the appointing of the Sabbath was not any arbitrary restriction upon man’s freedom, but a merciful provision for his good: that it is designed as a day of gladness and not of gloom. It is the Creator’s gracious exempting us from our life of mundane toil one day in seven, granting us a foretaste of that future and better life for which the present is but a probation, when we may turn wholly from that which is material to that which is spiritual, and thereby be equipped for taking hold with new consecration and renewed energies upon the work of the coming days.

It should thus be quite evident that this law for the regulation of man’s time was not a temporary one, designed for any particular dispensation, but is continuous and perpetual in the purpose of God: the Sabbath was “made for *man*” (Mark 2:27), and not simply for the Jew; made for man’s good. What has been pointed out above upon the twofoldness of this Divine statute receives clear and irrefutable confirmation in the reason given for its enforcement: “for in six days the Lord made Heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exo. 20:11). Observe well the *twofoldness* of this: the august Creator deigned to set an example before His creatures in each respect; HE worked for “six days,” HE “rested the seventh day!” It should also be pointed out that the appointing of work for man is not the consequence of sin: *before* the Fall, God put him “into the garden of Eden to *dress* and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

The lasting nature or perpetuity of this twofold Commandment is further evidenced by the fact that in the above reason given for its enforcement there was nothing in it which was peculiarly pertinent to the nation of Israel, but instead, that which speaks with clarion voice to the whole human race. Moreover, this statute was given a place not in the ceremonial law of Israel, which was to be done away when Christ fulfilled its types, but in the Moral Law, which was written by the finger of God Himself upon tables of stone, to signify to us its lasting nature. Finally, it should be pointed out the very terms of this Commandment make it unmistakably plain that it was not designed only for the Jews, for it was equally binding upon any Gentiles who dwelt among them: even though they were not in covenant with God, nor under the ceremonial

law, yet they were required to keep the Sabbath holy—"thou shalt not do any work . . . *nor thy stranger* that is within thy gates" (Exo. 20:10)!

"The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Note well it is *not* said (here, or anywhere in Scripture) "the seventh day *of the week*," but simply "the seventh day," that is, the day following the six of work. With the Jews it was the seventh day of the week, namely, Saturday, but for us it is—as the "another day" of Hebrews 4:8 plainly intimates—the first day of the week, because the Sabbath not only commemorates the work of creation, but it now also celebrates the yet greater work of redemption. Thus, the Lord so worded the Fourth Commandment as to suit *both* the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, and thereby intimated its perpetuity. The Christian Sabbath is from midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday: it is clear from John 20:1 that it began *before* sunrise, and therefore we may conclude it starts at Saturday midnight; while from John 20:19 we learn (from the fact it is not there called "the evening of the second day") that it continues throughout the evening, and that our worship is also to continue therein.

But though the Christian Sabbath does not commence till midnight on Saturday, yet our *preparation for it* must begin sooner, or how else can we obey its express requirement, "in it thou shalt not do any work?" On the Sabbath there is to be a complete resting the whole day, not only from natural recreations and doing our own pleasure (Isa. 58:13), but from all worldly employment, which includes such things as writing business or social letters, the reading of newspapers or secular literature, polishing our shoes, shaving, and preparing and cooking of food (Exo. 16:23)—for the wife needs a day of rest just as much as her husband, yea, being the "weaker vessel," more so. Such things as porridge and soup can be prepared on the Saturday and heated on the Sabbath, and this, that we may be entirely free to delight ourselves in the Lord and give ourselves completely to His worship and service. Let us also see to it that we do not work or sit up so late on the Saturday night that we encroach on the Lord's Day by staying late in bed or making ourselves drowsy for its holy duties.

This Commandment makes it clear that God is to be worshipped *in the home*, which, of course, inculcates the practice of family worship. It is addressed more specifically than any of the other nine Commandments to the heads of households and employers, because God requires them to see to it that all under their charge shall observe the Sabbath. To them, more immediately, God says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." It is to be strictly set apart to the honour of the thrice holy God, spent in the exercises of holy contemplation, meditation and adoration. Because it is the day which He has made (Psa. 118:24), we must do nothing to unmake it. This Commandment forbids the omission of any duties required, a careless performing of the same, or a weariness in them. The more faithfully we keep *this* Commandment, the better prepared shall we be to obey the other nine.

Three classes of works, and three only, may be engaged in on the Holy Sabbath. Works of *necessity*, which are those that could not be done on the preceding day and that cannot be deferred till the next—such as tending to cattle. Works of *mercy*, which are those that compassion require us to perform unto other creatures—such as ministering to the sick. Works of *piety*, which are the worship of God in public and in private, using with thankfulness and delight all the means of grace which He has provided. We need to watch and strive against the very first suggestions of Satan to corrupt our hearts, divert our minds, or disturb us in holy duties; praying earnestly for help to meditate upon God's Word and to retain what He gives us. The Lord makes

the sacred observance of His Day of special blessing; and contrariwise, He visits the profanation of the Sabbath with special cursing (see Neh. 13:17, 18), as our guilty land is now proving to its bitter cost.—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 SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

19. *Anxiety Forbidden*: Matthew 6:26, 27.

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life” (Matt. 6:25). Last month we pointed out that Christ was not here forbidding a diligent use of all lawful means in our earthly calling, nor a judicious laying by against a future rainy day; rather is He prohibiting that worrying about the future which evidences a distrust of Divine Providence and a doubting of our Father’s goodness. Yet so senseless are we, so filled with unbelief, so slow to obey this precept, that our Lord not only repeated the same in verse 31, but condescends to reason with us and enforce His injunction by a great variety of cogent arguments. This at once intimates to us the deep importance which He attaches to a heart that is free from distrustful anxiety and distracting fear, and also makes unmistakably evident the exceeding sinfulness of such sins. Let us then seek grace to attend closely unto our Lord’s reasoning in this connection and treasure up in our hearts His different arguments.

“Take no (anxious) thought for your life.” As Matthew Henry tersely summarizes it: “(1) Not about the *continuance* of it: refer it to God, to lengthen or shorten as He please. (2) Not about the *comforts* of it: refer it to God, to embitter or sweeten as He pleases.” Our times are in His hands. The One who communicated life to our bodies has unalterably decreed the exact length of our earthly existence: “Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass” (Job 14:4), so that all our fretting and fuming is needless and useless, for neither planning nor worrying can prolong our natural life a single hour. And so long as we faithfully perform our duty and trust in God we need not be the slightest bit concerned as to *how* He is going to provide for us. The Lord is not tied to ways and means, and when one source of supplies fails us He will open another—as He did for Elijah.

“Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (v. 25). Here is the first of seven reasons or arguments used by Christ on this occasion to show us how foolish, how needless, how useless, how sinful are anxious thoughts and distracting fears over the supply of our temporal needs. It is in inference drawn from the greater to the less: an argument frequently made use of in Scripture, but one, alas, that we easily forget—see the “much more” of Romans 5:9, 10, 15. It is an argument based upon the infinite goodness and unchanging faithfulness of our Creator: God Himself has given us life and a body, and He does not stop half-way in His bestowments: when He implants life, He also grants all that is needed for its sustenance. When God gives, He gives royally and liberally, honestly and sincerely, logically and completely. Therefore we may rest assured that when He bestows life itself, He is not going to sully His own gift by withholding anything that is needful for our good and blessing.

“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26). These words contain Christ’s second reason to dissuade us from distrustful care about things needed. It is taken from the consideration of God’s providing for creatures inferior to us, His supplying needed things for them. It was as though the Redeemer said, Do you want further assurance that God will provide for all your temporal needs?—then lift up your eyes to the air and mark its feathered inhabitants as they flit to and fro, free from anxiety, filling the atmosphere with their cheerful songs. O how they should show us, who are so often distrustful and despondent, how

much more cause have we to celebrate the goodness of our gracious God and show forth His praises. Yet it is much to be feared that He receives less acknowledgement from us, fewer expressions of gratitude, than He does from those creatures upon whom He has bestowed the feeblest endowment.

“Behold the fowls of the air”: that is, take a serious view of, thoughtfully contemplate them. From this we learn that it is our duty to duly consider the works of God, labouring to behold His wisdom, goodness, power, mercy and providence therein. This is the lesson inculcated by Solomon: “Consider the works of God” (Eccl. 7:13), and by Eliphaz, “Remember that thou magnify His work, which men behold” (Job 36:24). God has revealed Himself through His works as truly as He has through His Word, and we are greatly the losers if we fail to examine carefully and ponder prayerfully the wonders of creation wherein the Divine perfections are so blessedly displayed. “O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches” (Psa. 104:24). “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein . . . He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered” (Psa. 111:2, 4). “Marvellous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psa. 139:14).

Why was it that the Lord God took six days to make one creature after another, then take a particular view of them all after their creation, beholding with pleasure the products of His hands (Gen. 1:31), and then sanctify the seventh day for a holy rest? Was it not, among other reasons, to teach us by His own example to *consider* distinctly all the works of His hands, and that among other duties we should meditate on the Lord’s Day upon the wondrous and glorious works of our Creator? This was David’s practice, as we learn from his Sabbath Psalm: “For Thou, LORD, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands. O LORD, how great are Thy works! and Thy thoughts are very deep” (92:4, 5). O to be able to say with him, “I meditate on all Thy works: I muse on the work of Thy hands” (Psa. 143:5)! How otherwise can we intelligently discharge the duty laid upon us in, “One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall *declare* Thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of Thy majesty, and of Thy Wondrous works” (Psa. 145:4, 5).

“Behold the fowls of the air.” And what is it we are specially *to learn* and take to heart in connection with them? Why this: “They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.” They use not the means of provision which man does, and therefore have not that care and anxiety which he has. They are not required to perform those labours which are demanded of us, nor commanded to eat in the sweat of their face; nevertheless, they do not starve to death. Here is a marvellous fact which few ponder—the manner in which the lower animals, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, are provided with their food and clothing supplies a most convincing and unbelief-rebuking demonstration of the superintendence of God over this world. It displays in so many ways His manifold wisdom, His wondrous providence, His infinite goodness, His unflinching faithfulness, His tender care, His compassions which are “new every morning.”

If the question be asked, Since the fowls of the air sow not, neither reap nor gather into barns, how then are they provided for? The answer is, that they expect their food from God’s own hand. “Who provideth for the raven his food, when his young ones cry *unto God*” (Job 38:41). “So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts . . . these wait all upon Thee, that Thou mayest give them their meat in due season”

(Psa. 104:25, 27). "The eyes of all *wait upon thee*, and Thou givest them their meat in due season" (Psa. 145:15). "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry" (Psa. 147:9). But how can irrational creatures be said to cry unto God? They do not use prayer as men do, yet are they said to "wait on God," because by a natural instinct in creation they seek for that food which God has ordained for them and are content therewith. By such phrases as, "they cry to God," He would teach us that they depend upon His Providence wholly for provision and rest satisfied therewith.

Here we may see how the irrational creature, made subject to vanity by the sin of man, come nearer to their first estate and better observe the order of nature in their creation than man does, for they seek only for that which God has provided for them, and when they receive it are content; whereas man is deeply fallen from the estate of his creation in regard to his dependency on God's Providence for temporal things. Though he be endowed with reason, and has the use of means which the fowls of Heaven lack, yet his heart is filled with distrustful care, whether we respect the obtaining of or the use which he makes of earthly things. This solemnly demonstrates that man is more corrupt than other creatures, more vile and base than are the brute beasts. How deeply this ought to humble everyone of us under a serious consideration of our sinfulness, that we have so debased our nature that we are more rebellious to the laws of our being and more distrustful of the Divine Providence than are irrational creatures!

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." How the consideration of this truth ought to take us off from our useless and senseless worrying. The feathered creatures of the air use not means, yet are they fed. Man is required to use means, for God has ordained them for his provision: if, then, we dutifully employ them, in obedience to and trust in God, will He suffer us to want? Birds are incapable of providing for themselves, unable to lay up a store of food against the winter's snow and cold, yet their needs are supplied. *We* are granted foresight and the means of providing for a rainy day: if we are faithful therein, will God mock our industry? Surely not: then how unnecessary, how dishonouring to God, how sinful is our troubling care, our distrust, our fretting and worrying!

"Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." Herein we may observe God's special and particular providence. The dictates of reason would lead us to conclude that those creatures which are incapable of making provision for themselves and laying up store in summertime against the winter, would starve when the earth yields not such means of nourishment during the cold weather and when the ground is covered with snow; yet they do not commonly do so. Yea, experience shows that birds are for the most part fatter for human consumption in the winter than they are in the summer! What a striking and blessed manifestation of God's special providence is this: that He attends to and meets the need of His feathered creatures and feeds them in the dead of winter! O how this should shame us for doubting His Providence, how it rebukes our wicked distrust of His care, how it exposes the groundlessness and wickedness of our unbelief! Next time you are tempted to worry over future supplies, dear reader, and rack your poor brains over where they are going to come from, think of the birds of the air and remember that a faithful Creator feeds them even in the winter.

"Your Heavenly Father feedeth them." Has He not here set before us an example which we would do well to follow? "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1) If God

is so merciful unto the fowls of Heaven as to feed them, then must not those who are His children evidence their likeness to the Father by exercising mercy unto all His creatures? True, He is not dependent upon *our* aid, yet is He often pleased to make use of means: then next time the ground is covered with snow, fail not to place some crusts of bread or lumps of suet in your garden or backyard, and when the ponds are frozen over put a cup of hot water within the reach of your feathered friends. And let not your kindness be limited unto the birds, but extend it also unto the animals, the poor among men, and especially unto any indigent members of the Household of Faith. In time of stress and scarcity, refrain from profiteering and grinding the face of the poor.

“Are ye not much better than they” (Matt. 6:26). Here is the application which Christ makes of His second argument. Considered simply as members of the human race we are creatures of a nobler order than the fowls of the air, for we are endowed with rationality and designed for an eternal destiny. If, then, God feeds the birds of the air, will He fail to provide for those who are created in His own image? But considered as sons and daughters of the Almighty, the objects of His special love, of redeeming grace, of the quickening operations of the Holy Spirit, as begotten unto an inheritance “incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us” (1 Peter 1:4), think you that the heavenly Father will suffer any of *them* to starve to death while they pass through this wilderness of sin? If He provides for the birds in the dead of winter, is He unable or unwilling to minister to our temporal needs in sickness or old age? How small is our faith in His goodness, His faithfulness, His tender care, if we worry now about where our future bread or clothing is to come from!

“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matt. 6:27). Here is the third reason advanced by Christ against worrying for worldly things. It is propounded in the way of a question, which form of speech imports the affirming of or denying of the thing spoken of with more vehemence. Here it has the force of an emphatic negative: as though Christ had said, Certainly none of you, by taking care can add a single cubit to his height. This unanswerable argument is taken from man’s impotency: neither the most ambitious, the strongest, or the wisest is able to do so. We did not reach our present weight or height by any efforts of our own, but solely by the providence of God. “An infant of a span long has grown up to be a man of six feet, and how was one cubit after another added to his stature? Not by his own foresight or contrivance: he grew he knew not how, by the power and goodness of God” (Matthew Henry).

A “cubit” varies from eighteen to twenty-one inches, being the measure taken from the length of a man’s arm from the elbow to the tip of his middle finger. Now in the framing of a man’s body, God brings it from a span long in the mother’s womb by gradual increase, adding to it cubit after cubit until he has reached the height God ordained. The exact height each man comes to God has appointed, and no man, either by his skill, his anxiety, or his industry, can extend the stature God has determined for him. That is the work of the Creator: He who gives the body, decrees the stature, and by His Providence brings it thereto by daily increase. Hence, reasons Christ, since man cannot by the most diligent use of means augment his stature one cubit, neither can he by all his fretting and fuming, toiling and slaving, better his temporal estate for things needful in this life, and therefore it is heedless and useless to vex our hearts therewith.

“We cannot alter the stature we are of, if we would: what a foolish and ridiculous, thing would it be for a man of low stature to perplex himself, to break his sleep and beat his brains

about it, and to be continually taking thought how he might be a cubit higher; when, after all, he knows he cannot effect it, and therefore he had better be content and take it as it is . . . Now as we do in reference to our bodily state, so we should do in reference to our worldly state. (1) We should not covet an abundance of the wealth of this world. (2) We must reconcile ourselves to our state, as we do to our stature: we must set the conveniences against the inconveniences, and so make a virtue of necessity—what cannot be remedied must be made the best of. We cannot alter the disposals of Providence, and therefore must acquiesce in them and accommodate ourselves to them” (Matthew Henry).

Certain it is that man’s labour, care and industry is utterly vain and fruitless without the blessing of God’s Providence. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows” (Psa. 127:1, 2). “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6, 7). If two such men as these could do nothing of themselves, what shall we think to do? This same truth—so much lost sight of today—is brought out once again in, “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes . . . Ye looked for much. and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it” (Hag. 1:6, 9). How this should teach us to commend all the sober care and labour of our lawful callings to God by prayer for His blessing, and when He has granted the same, fail not to return thanks unto Him.

No man can better his natural estate in this world either for wealth or dignity, by all his care and labour, above that which God has appointed him to reach unto. As the Creator has determined each man’s bodily stature which we cannot add to, so He has foreordained what each man’s estate shall be, whether of wealth or poverty, dignity or disgrace, and it lies not in the power of any creature to alter the same. “Lift up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psa. 75:5-7). “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up” (1 Sam. 2:7)—true alike naturally and spiritually. The grand lessons to be drawn from all of this are that we must learn to depend upon God in the sober use of lawful means, to humbly seek His blessing thereon, to rest content therewith, whether it be more or less, accepting with gratitude and thanksgiving the portion He has been pleased to allot us. We are completely dependent upon God for our stature, so why not leave *all* things to Him!—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.18. *On Carmel.*

“And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name” (1 Kings 18:31). This was very striking and blessed, for it was taking the place of faith against the evidence of sight. There were present in that assembly only the subjects of Ahab, and consequently, members of none but the ten tribes. But Elijah took twelve stones to build the altar with, intimating that he was about to offer sacrifice in the name of the whole nation (cf. Josh. 4:20; Ezra 6:17). Thereby he testified to *their unity*, the union existing between Judah and the ten tribes. The Object of their worship had originally been one and the same and must be so now. Thus Elijah viewed Israel from the Divine standpoint. In the mind of God the Nation had appeared before Him as one from all eternity. Outwardly they were now two. But the Prophet ignored that division: he walked not by sight, but by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). This is what God delights in. Faith is that which honours Him, and therefore does He ever own and honour faith wherever it is found. He did so here on Carmel, and He does so today. “Lord, *increase* our faith.”

And what is the grand truth that was symbolized by this incident? Is it not obvious? Must we not look beyond the typical and natural Israel unto the spiritual and antitypical Israel, the Church which is the Body of Christ? Surely. Then what? This: amid the widespread dispersion which now obtains—the “children of God” which are scattered abroad” (John 11:52)—amid the various denominations, we must not lose sight of the mystical and essential oneness of all the people of God. Here, too, we must walk by faith and not by sight. We should view things from the Divine standpoint: we should contemplate that Church which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself as it exists in the eternal purpose and everlasting counsels of the blessed Trinity. We shall never see the unity of the Bride, the Lamb’s wife visibly manifested before our outward eyes until we behold her descending out of Heaven “having the glory of God.” But meanwhile it is both our duty and privilege to enter into God’s ideal, to perceive the spiritual unity of His saints, and to own that unity by receiving into our affections *all* who manifest something of the image of Christ, whether they be known as Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren, or any of the designations which now obtain among men. Such is the truth inculcated by the “twelve stones” used by Elijah.

“And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the Sons of Jacob.” Let us also take notice how Elijah was regulated here by the Law of the Lord. God had given express directions about His altar: “If thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon” (Exo. 20:25, 26). In strict accordance with that Divine statute, Elijah did not send for stones that had been quarried and polished by human art, but used rough and unhewn stones which lay upon the mountain side. He took what God had provided and not what man had made. He acted according to the Divine pattern furnished him in the Holy Scriptures, for God’s work must be done in the manner and method appointed by God.

This, too, is written for our learning. Each several act on this occasion, every detail of Elijah’s procedure, needs to be noted and pondered if we would discover what is required from us if the Lord is to show Himself strong on our behalf. In connection with His service God has not left

not left things to our discretion nor to the dictates of either human wisdom or expediency. He has supplied us with a "pattern" (compare Heb. 8:5), and He is very jealous of that pattern and requires us to be ordered by the same. Everything must be done as God has appointed. The moment we depart from God's pattern, that is, the moment we fail to act in strict conformity to a, "thus saith the Lord," we are acting in self-will, and can no longer count upon His blessing. We must not expect "the fire of God" until we have fully met His requirements.

In view of what has just been pointed out, need we have any difficulty in discovering why the blessing of God has departed from the churches, why His miracle-working power is no longer seen working in their midst? It is because there has been such woeful departure from His "pattern," because so many innovations have come in, because they have employed carnal weapons in their spiritual warfare, because they have wickedly brought in worldly means and methods. In consequence, the Holy Spirit is grieved and quenched. Not only must the occupant of the pulpit heed the Divine injunction and preach "the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2), but the whole service, discipline and life of the church must be regulated by the directions God has given. The path of obedience is the path of spiritual prosperity and blessing, but the way of self-will and self-seeking is one of impotency and disaster.

"And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed" (1 Kings 18:32). Ah, take note of that: "He built an altar *in the name of the LORD.*" That is, by His authority—for His glory. And thus should it ever be with us—"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). This is one of the basic rules for the governance of all our actions. O what a difference it would make if professing Christians were regulated thereby! How many difficulties would be removed and how many problems solved. The young believer often wonders whether this or that practice is right or wrong. Let it be brought to this touchstone: Can I ask God's blessing upon it? can I do it in the name of the Lord? If not, then it is sinful. Alas, how much in Christendom is now being done under the holy Name of Christ which He has never authorized, which is grievously dishonouring to Him, which is a stench in His nostrils. "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

"And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood" (1 Kings 18:33). And here again observe how strictly Elijah kept to the "pattern" furnished him in the Scriptures. Through Moses the Lord had given orders in connection with the burnt offering that, "he shall flay the burnt offering, and *cut it into his pieces.* And the sons of Aaron the priests shall put fire upon the altar, and *lay the wood in order* upon the fire: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head and the fat, in order upon the wood" (Lev. 1:6-8). Those details in the conduct of Elijah are the more noteworthy because of what is recorded of the prophets of Baal on this occasion: nothing is said of *their* "putting the wood in order" or of "cutting the bullock in pieces and laying him on the wood," but merely that they "dressed it and called on the name of Baal" (1 Kings 18:26). Ah, it is in these "little things" as men term them, that we see the difference between the true and the false servants of God.

"And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood." And is there not here also important instruction for us? The work of the Lord is not to be performed carelessly and hurriedly, but with great precision and reverence. Think of *Whose* service we are engaged in if we are the ministers of Christ. Is He not richly entitled to our best! How we

need to “study to show ourselves approved unto God” if we are to be “workmen that needeth not to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15). What a fearful word is that in Jeremiah 48:10: “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD negligently” (margin): then let us seek grace to heed this malediction in the preparing of our sermons (or articles) or whatsoever we undertake in the name of our Master. Searching indeed is that declaration of Christ’s, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). Not only is the glory of God immediately concerned, but the everlasting weal or woe of immortal souls is involved when we engage in the work of the Lord.

“And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water” (1 Kings 18:33-35). How calm and dignified was his manner! There was no haste, no confusion—everything was done “decently and in order.” He was under no apprehension of success, but certain of the outcome. Some have wondered where so much water could he obtained after a three years’ drought, but it must be remembered that the sea was near by, and doubtless it was from it the water was brought—*twelve* barrels in all, again corresponding to the number of Israel’s tribes!

Ere passing on, let us pause and behold here the strength of the Prophet’s faith in the power and goodness of his God. The pouring of so much water upon the altar, the flooding of the offering and the wood beneath it, would make it appear utterly impracticable and unlikely for any fire to consume it. Elijah was determined that the Divine interposition should be the more convincing and illustrious. He was so sure of God that he feared not to heap difficulties in His way, knowing that there can be no difficulty unto One who is omniscient and omnipotent. The more unlikely the answer was, the more glorified therein would be his Master. O wondrous faith which can laugh at impossibilities, which can even increase them so as to have the joy of seeing God vanquishing them! It is the bold and venturesome faith which He delights to honour. Alas, how little of this we now behold. Truly this is a day of “small things.” Yea, it is a day when unbelief abounds. Unbelief is appalled by difficulties, schemes to remove them, as though God needed any help from us!

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the Prophet came near” (v. 36). By waiting until the hour when “the evening sacrifice” was offered (in the temple), Elijah acknowledged *his fellowship* with the worshippers at Jerusalem. And is there not a lesson in this for many of the Lord’s people in this dark day? “Living in isolated places, cut off from the means of grace, yet they should recall the hour of the weekly preaching-service, and the prayer-meeting, and at the same hour draw near unto the Throne of Grace and mingle *their* petitions with those of their brethren away yonder in the church of their youth. It is our holy privilege to have and maintain *spiritual communion* with saints when bodily contact with them is no longer possible. So, too, may the sick and the aged, though deprived of public ordinances, thus join in the general chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Especially should we attend to this duty and enjoy this privilege during the hours of the Sabbath.

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the Prophet came near.” But something else, something deeper, something more precious was de-

noted by Elijah's waiting until that particular time. That "evening sacrifice" which was offered every day in the temple at Jerusalem, three hours before sunset, pointed forward to the antitypical Burnt Offering, which was to be slain when the fullness of time should come. Relying on that Great Sacrifice for the sins of God's people which the Messiah would offer at His appearing on earth, His servant now took his place by an altar which pointed forward to the Cross. Elijah, as well as Moses, had all intense interest in that Great Sacrifice, as was very clear from the fact that they "spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" when they appeared and talked with Christ on the Mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:30, 31). It was with his faith depending upon the blood of Christ (not the blood of a bullock) that Elijah now presented his petitions unto God!

"And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the Prophet *came near*": that is, unto the altar which he had built and on which he had laid the sacrifice. Yea, "came near," though expecting an answer by *fire*! yet not in the least afraid. Again we say, what holy confidence in God! Elijah was fully assured that the One whom he served, whom he was now honouring, would not hurt him. Ah, his long sojourn at the brook Cherith and the lengthy days spent in his upper room in the widow's house at Zarephath had not been wasted. He had improved the time by spending it in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, and there he had learned precious lessons which none of the schools of men can impart. Fellow minister, suffer us to point out that power from God in *public* ordinances can only be acquired by drawing upon the power of God in *private*. Holy boldness before the people must be obtained by prostration of soul at the footstool of mercy in the closet.

"And said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). This was far more than a reference to the ancestors of his people or the founders of his nation. It was something more than either a patriotic or sentimental utterance. It gave further evidence of the strength of his faith and made manifest the ground upon which it rested. It was the owning of Jehovah as the *Covenant God* of His people, and who as such had promised never to forsake them. The Lord had entered into solemn covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7, 8), which He had renewed with Isaac and Jacob. To that covenant the Lord made reference when He appeared unto Moses at the burning bush (Exo. 3:6 and cf. 2:24). When Israel was oppressed by the Syrians in the days of Jehoahaz we are told that, "The LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (2 Kings 13:23). Elijah's acting faith on the covenant in the hearing of the people reminded them of the *foundation* of their hope and blessing. O what a difference it makes when we are able to plead "the blood of the Everlasting Covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36). This was Elijah's first petition, and mark well the *nature* of it, for it makes clearly manifest his own character. The heart of the Prophet was filled with a burning zeal for the glory of God. He could not bear to think of those wrecked altars and martyred Prophets. He could not tolerate the land being defiled with the God-insulting and soul-destroying idolatry of the heathen. It was not himself that he cared about, but the horrible fact that the people of Israel were entertaining the idea that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had abdicated in favour of Baal. His spirit was stirred to its depths as he contemplated how blatantly and grievously Jehovah was dishonoured. O that we were more deeply moved by the languishing state of Christ's

cause upon earth today, by the inroads of the Enemy and the awful desolation which he has wrought in Zion! Alas that a spirit of indifference, or at least of fatalistic stoicism, is freezing so many of us.

The chief burden of Elijah's prayer was that God should vindicate Himself that day, that He would make known His mighty power, that He would turn the people's heart back unto Himself. It is only when we can look beyond personal interests and plead for the glory of God that we reach the place where He will not deny us. Alas, we are so anxious about the success of *our* work, the prosperity of *our* church or denomination, that we lose sight of the infinitely more important matter of the vindication and honour of our Master. Is there any wonder that our circle enjoys so little of God's blessing! Our blessed Redeemer has set us a better example: "I seek not Mine own glory" (John 8:50), declared that One who was "meek and lowly in heart." "Father, glorify *Thy* name" (John 12:28), was the controlling desire of His heart. When longing for His disciples to bear fruit it was that, "herein is My Father glorified" (John 15:8). "I have glorified Thee on the earth" (John 17:4) said the Son at the completion of His mission. And now He declares, "whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that *the Father* may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

"Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am *Thy servant*." How blessed to behold this man, by whose word the windows of Heaven were closed, at whose prayers the dead were restored to life, before whom even the king quailed—how blessed, we say, to see him taking such a place before God. "Let it be known . . . that I am Thy servant." It was the subordinate place, the *lowly* place, the place where he was under orders. A "servant" is one whose will is entirely surrendered to another, whose personal interests are completely subservient to those of his master, whose desire and joy it is to please and honour the one who employs him. And this was the attitude of Elijah: he was completely yielded unto God, seeking His glory and not his own. "Christian service" is not doing something for Christ—it is doing *those* things which *He* has appointed and assigned us.

Fellow ministers, is this *our* character? Are our wills so surrendered to God that we can truly say, "I am Thy *servant*"? But note another thing here—"Let it *be known* that . . . I am Thy servant"—own me as such by the manifestation of Thy power. It is not enough that the minister of the Gospel is God's servant, it must be *made manifest* that he is such. How? By his separation from the world, by his devotedness to his Master, by his love for and care of souls, by his untiring labours, by self-denial and self-sacrifice, by spending himself and being spent in ministering to others; and, by the Lord's *seal* on his ministry. "By their fruits ye shall know them": by the holiness of their character and conduct, by the working of God's Spirit in and through them, by the walk of those who sit under their ministry. How we need to pray, "Let it be known that I *am* Thy servant."—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

7. *Its Complement.*

Our principal design in writing one more article on this aspect of our subject that the complementary doctrine of man's spiritual impotency is his moral responsibility, is to make plainly manifest the tremendous importance of preserving the balance of Truth which is mainly a matter of setting forth each element of it in its Scriptural proportions. Almost all theological and religious error consists of Truth perverted, Truth wrongly divided, Truth misapplied, Truth overemphasized, or Truth view in a wrong perspective. The fairest face on earth, possessed of the most comely features, would soon become ugly and unsightly if one feature continued growing while the others remained undeveloped. Physical beauty is mainly a thing of due proportion. And thus it is with the Word of God. Its beauty and blessedness is best perceived when presented in its true proportions. Here is where so many have failed in the past—some favourite doctrine has been concentrated upon and others of equal importance neglected.

It is freely granted that in these degenerate days, the servant of God is often called upon to give special emphasis to those verities of Holy Writ which are now so generally ignored and denied. Yet even here much wisdom is needed lest our zeal run away with us. The requirements of that word, "meat in due season" must ever be borne in mind. When labouring among Arminians we should not altogether omit the human-responsibility side of the Truth, yet the main emphasis ought to be placed upon the Divine sovereignty and those corollaries thereof which are so sadly perverted if not blankly denied by Free-willers. Contrariwise when ministering to Calvinists our chief endeavour should be to bring before them not those things they most *like* to hear, but those which they most *need*—those aspects of Truth they are least familiar with. Only thus can we be of the greatest service to either party.

To illustrate what we have just said, take the subject of Prayer. In preaching thereon to Arminians it would be well to define very clearly what this holy exercise is *not* designed to accomplish and what is its spiritual aim, showing that our praying is not intended for the overcoming of any reluctance in God to bestow the mercies we need, still less are our supplications meant to effect any change in the Divine purpose, for "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" (Psa. 33:11). Rather is the purpose of prayer that of subjecting ourselves unto God and asking for those things which are according to His will. In preaching to Calvinists thereon we should warn against that fatalistic attitude which assumes that it will make no difference to the event whether we petition God or no, reminding them that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). So, too, the former need rebuking for irreverence and unholy familiarity in addressing the Most High, while the latter should be encouraged to approach the Throne of Grace with holy boldness, with the liberty of children petitioning their Father.

The same course needs to be followed when expounding the great subject of Salvation: discrimination must be used as to *which* aspects most need to be set before any particular congregation. The manner in which this most blessed theme should be presented calls for much understanding, not only of the subject itself but also of the spiritual intelligence and particular needs of those being addressed. Some aspects of the Truth are more difficult to apprehend than others (2 Peter 3:16) and they need to be approached gradually and given out "here a little, and there a little." We are well aware that in offering such counsels as these we lay ourselves open to the

charge of acting Jesuitically, yet, in reality, we are but advocating the very policy pursued by Christ and His Apostles. Of the Saviour it is recorded that, “with many such parables spake He the Word unto them, as *they were able to hear it*” (Mark 4:33), and addressing His Apostles, He said, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). (Compare also 1 Cor. 3:1, 2; 9:19-22).

What we have advocated above is simply adopting our presentation of the Truth according to the state of our congregation. There is a vast difference between presenting the *way* of salvation to the unconverted and expounding the *doctrine* of salvation to those who are converted, though too many preachers make little distinction here. Great care needs to be exercised when preaching from one of the Epistles to a general congregation. Lest on the one hand, the children’s bread be cast to the dogs, or on the other, seekers after the Lord be stumbled. While it is true that, in the absolute sense, no sinner can save himself or even contribute anything toward his salvation by any physical or mental act of his own, yet he must be constantly reminded that the Gospel sets before him an external Saviour (rather than One who is working secretly and invincibly in him) whom he is responsible to promptly receive on the terms He has offered to him.

It is most important that pulpit and pew alike should have a right conception of the relation of faith to salvation, a full-orbed conception and not a restricted and one-sided view. Believing is not only an evidence of salvation and a mark of regeneration, but it is also necessary *in order to* salvation. True, the sinner is not saved for his faith, yet it is equally true that he cannot be saved without it. That believing is in one sense a saving act is clearly affirmed in, “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). Take the case of Cornelius. It is plain from Acts 10:2, 4 that a work of grace has been wrought in his heart before Peter was sent to him, yet Acts 11:14 makes it equally clear that the Apostle must go and speak words “whereby he and his house be saved,” and part of those “words” were “to Him give all the Prophets witness, that through His name whosoever *believeth in Him* shall receive remission of sins” (10:43). Let it not be objected that we are hereby making a saviour of faith, for Christ hesitated not to say, “thy faith hath saved thee” (Luke 7:50).

As an example of how blessedly Calvin himself preserved the balance of Truth, we quote the following from his Institutes. “Yet at the same time a pious man will not overlook inferior causes. Nor because he accounts those from whom he has received any benefit, the ministers of the Divine goodness, will he therefore cast them by unnoticed, as though they deserved no thanks for their kindness; but will feel and readily acknowledge his obligation to them, and study to return it as ability and opportunity may permit. Finally, he will reverence and praise God as the principal Author of benefits received, will honour men as His ministers; and will understand, what, indeed, is the fact that the will of God has laid him under obligations to those persons by whose means the Lord has been pleased to communicate His benefits.” While ascribing the supreme honour and glory to the Author of every blessing, we must not despise the instruments He may design to employ in the imparting of them.

The great Reformer went on: “If he suffer any loss either through negligence or through imprudence, he will conclude that it happened according to the Divine will, but *will also* impute the blame of it to himself. If anyone be removed by disease, whom, while it was his duty to take care of him, he has treated with neglect—though he cannot be ignorant that that person had reached those limits which it was impossible for him to pass, yet he will not make this a plea to extenuate

his guilt; but, because he has not faithfully performed his duty towards him, will consider him as having perished through *his* criminal negligence. Much less, when fraud and preconceived malice appear in the perpetration either of murder or of theft, will he excuse those enormities under the pretext of the Divine Providence: in the *same* crime he will distinctly contemplate the righteousness of God *and* the iniquity of man, as they respectively discover themselves” (Book 1, chapter 17, section 9). How far was Calvin from the squint-eyed vision of many who now claim to be his admirers!

When writing on “the conducting of prayer in a right and proper manner,” Calvin said: “The fourth and last rule is, That thus prostrate with true humility, we should nevertheless be animated to pray by the certain hope of obtaining our requests. It is indeed an apparent contradiction to connect a certain confidence of God’s favour with a sense of His righteous vengeance, though these two things are perfectly consistent if persons oppressed by their own guilt be encouraged solely by the Divine goodness. For as we have before stated that repentance and faith, of which one terrifies and the other exhilarates, are inseparably connected, so their union is necessary in prayer. And this agreement is briefly expressed by David: ‘I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy; and in Thy fear will I worship toward Thy holy temple’ (Psa. 5:7). Under the goodness of God he comprehends faith, though not to the exclusion of fear, for His majesty not only commands our reverence, but our own unworthiness makes us forget all pride and security and fills us with fear. I do not mean a confidence which delivers the mind from all sense of anxiety, and sooths it into pleasant and perfect tranquility, for such a placid satisfaction belongs to those whose prosperity is equal to their wishes, who are affected by no care, corroded by no anxiety and alarmed by no fear. And the saints have an excellent stimulus to calling upon God when their needs and perplexities harass and disquiet them and they are almost despairing in themselves, till faith opportunely relieves them; because amid such troubles the goodness of God is so glorious in their view, that though they groan under the pressure of present calamities and are likewise tormented with the fear of greater in future, yet a reliance on it alleviates the difficulty of bearing them and encourages a hope of deliverance.”

Here we have brought together two radically different exercises of the mind, which are totally diverse in their springs, their nature and their tendency—fear and confidence, perturbation and tranquility: two spiritual graces which some imagine neutralize each other—humility and assurance. A sight of God’s ineffable holiness fills a renewed heart with awe, and when it is coupled with a sense of His high majesty and inflexible righteousness, the soul—conscious of its excuseless sins, its defilement and its guilt—is made to fear and tremble, feeling utterly unfit and unworthy to address the Most High. Yes, but if the humbled saint is able to also contemplate the goodness of God, view Him as the Father of mercies and consider some of His exceeding great and precious promises which are exactly suited to his dire needs, he is thereby encouraged to hope, and while his humility does not then degenerate into presumption, yet is he now constrained to come boldly unto the Throne of Grace and present his petitions.

“The prayers of a pious man, therefore, must proceed from *both* these dispositions, and must also contain and discover them both: though he must groan under present evils and is anxiously afraid of new ones, yet at the same time he must resort for refuge to God, not doubting His readiness to extend the assistance of His hand. For God is highly displeased by our distrust if we supplicate Him for blessings which we have no expectation of receiving. There is nothing, there-

fore, more suitable to the nature of prayers, than that they be conformed to this rule—not to rush forward with temerity, but to follow the steps of faith. ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering’ (James 1:5, 6). Where, by opposing ‘faith’ to ‘wavering’ he very aptly expresses its nature. And equally worthy of attention is what he adds, that they avail nothing who call upon God in unbelief and doubt, and are uncertain in their minds whether they shall be heard or not.”

The charge preferred by God against Israel’s priests of old—“ye have not kept My ways, but have been *partial* in the Law” (Mal. 2:9)—applies to many preachers today. Some have gone to such extremes that they have denied there is any such thing as God chastising His own dear children, arguing that since, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel” (Num. 23:21), and since He has declared of His Bride, “Thou art all fair My love, there is no spot in thee” (Song. 4:7), then there remains no occasion for the rod. It is this dwelling upon favourite portions of Truth to the exclusion of all others which has led many into grievous errors. The non-imputation of sin *to* believers and the chastising of sin *in* believers are both plainly taught in the Scriptures (see, for example, 2 Sam. 12:13, 14 where both facts are mentioned side by side), and whether or not they can be reconciled to mere human reason, both must be firmly held by us.

As Matthew Henry tersely expressed it, “In the doctrine of Christ there are paradoxes which to men of corrupt mind are stumbling stones.” It is the *twofoldness* of Truth which has (in part) furnished occasion for Infidels to declare that, “the Bible is full of contradictions,” for being blind spiritually, they are unable to perceive the perfect harmony of the whole. To what a sorry pass have things come, then, when we find some who wish to be regarded as the very champions of orthodoxy, making the same charge against those who contend for the *entire* Faith once delivered to the saints. The Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, is the standard which must be applied to the pulpit equally with the courts of law. One element of Truth must not be pressed to such an extreme that another is denied, but each given its due and distinctive place.

It is a favourite device of Satan’s to drive from one extreme to another. This may be seen by observing the order to the temptations which he set before the Saviour. First, he sought to overthrow Christ’s faith, bring Him to doubt the Word of God and His goodness unto Him—He has proclaimed from Heaven that Thou art His beloved Son, yet He is suffering You to starve to death here in the wilderness—as is clear from Satan’s, “if Thou be the Son of God” prefacing his, “command that these stones be made bread.” Finding that he had failed to prevail by such an assault, Satan then took the exact opposite course in his next attack, seeking to bring the Lord Jesus to act presumptuously: “If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest any time thou dash Thy foot against a stone.” The force of which was: since You are so fully assured of the Father’s loving care, demonstrate Your confidence in His protection; since Your faith in His Word is so unshakeable, count upon His promise that no harm shall befall You even though You cast Yourself from the pinnacle of the Temple.

The above has been recorded for our learning, for it makes manifest to us that guile of the Devil and the cunning tactics which he employs, especially that of swinging from one extreme to another. Let it be steadily borne in mind that as he dealt there with Christ the Head, so Satan continues to act with all His members. If he cannot bring them to one extreme, he will endeavour

to drive them to another. If he cannot bring a man to covetousness and miserliness then he will attempt to drive him to prodigality and thriftlessness. If a man be of the sober and somber type, let him beware lest the Devil in condemning him for this leads him into levity and irreverence. The Devil cannot endure one who turns not either to the right hand or to the left (Isa. 30:21), nevertheless, we must labour to keep the golden mean, neither doubting on the one hand, or presuming on the other, neither giving way to despair nor to recklessness.

Let us not forget that Truth itself may be misused (2 Peter 3:16), and the very grace of God turned into lasciviousness (Jude 4). Solemn warnings are these! "Commit thy way unto the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psa. 37:5)—that is a blessed promise, yet I altogether pervert the same if I use it to the neglect of duty and sit down and do nothing. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1)—that is an important precept, yet I put it to a wrong use if I so stand up for my own rights that I exercise no love unto the brethren. "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5) that, too, is a blessed promise, yet it does not exempt me from using all proper means for my preservation. The Christian farmer knows that unless God is pleased to bless his labours, he will reap no harvest, but that does not hinder him from plowing and harrowing.

Let us close these remarks by a helpful quotation from one who showed the perfect consistency between Romans 8:38, 39 and 1 Corinthians 9:27—"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." "The reckless and listless Corinthians thought they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted Apostle considered himself as engaged in a life-struggle for his salvation. The same Apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved and that the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyous assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in Heaven, earth or Hell could ever separate him from the love of God. The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other. It is only those who are conscious of this constant and deadly struggle with sin to whom this assurance is given. In the very same breath Paul says, 'O wretched man that I am,' and, 'thanks be to God who giveth us the victory' (Rom. 7:24, 25). It is the indolent and self-indulgent Christian who is always in doubt," to which we may add, as it is the empty professor who is filled with a carnal confidence (Charles Hodge on First Corinthians).—A.W.P.

THE SERVICE OF CHRIST.

“For my yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). As pointed out earlier, the “yoke,” when employed figuratively, is the symbol of *service*, for it is by means of such an instrument oxen are united together in the plow or wagon, that they may work for their master and perform his will. Here in our text it is the service of Christ which is brought before us, in contrast from the service of sin and Satan. The Devil promises his subjects a grand time of it if they will follow his promptings, but he is a liar, and sooner or later they discover that “the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). Sin deceives. Its deluded victims imagine they are enjoying liberty while indulging the lusts of the flesh, but when failing health or the dictates of prudence suggest they had better change their ways, they discover they are bound fast by habits they cannot break. Sin is a more cruel taskmaster than ever were the Egyptians to the Hebrews, and the service of Satan imposes far heavier burdens than ever Pharaoh placed upon his slaves. But “My yoke is *easy*,” says Christ, “and My burden is light.”

This declaration of the Saviour’s may also be regarded as the sequel to His opening words in this passage. There He is inviting to Himself those who were labouring (weary) and heavy laden, which may be understood in a twofold sense: those who are sick of sin and bowed down by a sense of its guilt, and those who are labouring to meet the requirements of Divine holiness and are cast down by their inability to do so. Those who, in a servile spirit, seek to fulfill the letter of God’s Law, so far from finding it “easy,” discover it to be very hard; while those who earnestly endeavour to work out a righteousness of their own in order to gain God’s esteem, prove it to be a heavy task and not a “light burden.” And there is no relief for such until they come to Christ and put their trust in *His* finished work. Coming to Christ requires us not only to turn our backs upon the world, but also to repudiate all our own merits and works.

“For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Exactly what is the relation between this verse and the one preceding? To which of the previous clauses is it more immediately connected? We cannot discover that any of the commentators have made any special attempt to answer this question. Personally we deem it wise to link these closing remarks of the Redeemer with each of the earlier utterances. Thus, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” There is encouragement for us to come and prove that He will give us rest. “Take My yoke upon you”: you need not fear to do so, “for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” “And learn of Me,” for not only am I, “meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls,” but “*for* My yoke is easy.”

“For My yoke is easy”: the Greek word is variously rendered—“good,” “kind,” “gracious.” There is nothing about it to chafe or hurt, rather is it pleasant and delightful to wear. The question has been raised, Is Christ here speaking absolutely or relatively? That is, is He describing what the yoke is in itself, or how that yoke appears unto His people? We believe that both senses are included. Most assuredly, Christ’s “yoke” or service is a light or gracious one in itself, for all His Commandments are framed by infinite wisdom and love, and are designed for the good of those who receive them. So far from being a harsh Tyrant who imposes hard duties for the mere sake of exerting His authority, or satisfying an arbitrary caprice, Christ is a kind and gracious Master who ever has in mind the welfare, the highest interests of His subjects. His Commandments ‘are not grievous’ in themselves, but beneficial and gracious. It is the father of lies who proclaims Christ’s yoke to be difficult and heavy.

But not only is the yoke of Christ “easy” in itself, but it should be so, it may be so, in the sense and apprehension of His people; yea, it *will be so*, if they do as He here bids them. It is indeed the case that the unregenerate find the yoke of Christ irksome and heavy, for it makes against the motions and the carnal nature. The service of Christ is veritable drudgery to those who are in love with the world and find their delight in gratifying their fleshly lusts—but to those whose heart has been, by His grace, captivated by the excellence of Christ—to be under His yoke is indeed pleasant—if we come to Christ daily to be renewed by His grace to yield ourselves afresh to His rules. If we sit at His feet to be taught of Him the loveliness of meekness and lowliness. If we enjoy spiritual communion with Him and partake of His rest. Then whatsoever *He* commands is delightful to us, and we prove for ourselves that, “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17). Such an one can bear testimony that Christ’s yoke *is* easy and His burden is light.

Herein the Christian may discover the best and most conclusive evidence that a good work of grace has begun in his heart. How many poor souls are deeply exercised and sorely distressed over this very point, continually asking themselves the question, Have I been genuinely converted, or am I yet in a state of nature? Thus they keep themselves in needless suspense because they fail to apply the Scriptural methods of confirmation. Instead of measuring themselves by the rules laid down in the Word, they await some extraordinary sensation in their heart or some verse of Scripture being powerfully impressed on their minds. But not only have many been deceived at this point—for Satan can produce happy sensations in the heart and deep impressions on the mind—but even where the Holy Spirit is the Author of such impressions, the effect is only transient and soon fades. How much better, then, is the testimony of an enlightened conscience, which, judging by the Word of God, perceives that I have been enabled to take upon me the yoke of Christ and that I find it to be “easy” and “light”!?

But this principle works both ways. If I find by experience that Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden light and that such an experience evidences I am one of His disciples indeed, then what must be said of that vast number of professing Christians who, by their own conduct and often by their confession avow that the Lord’s service is wearisome and burdensome? Though members of evangelical churches and assemblies, must we not conclude they are of that class who have a name that they live, and yet are dead (Rev. 3:1)? Certainly we cannot allow for a moment that Christ here made a false predication of His yoke. Then only one alternative is left: we are obliged to regard as strangers to vital godliness those who account a life of communion with the Lord and entire devotedness of His service, dull and irksome. Unspeakably solemn is this, for it makes evident what a high percentage of lifeless professors there are among us, who go through the outward forms of religion but find no joy and satisfaction therein.

Let us not be misunderstood at this point. We are far from affirming that the Christian life is nothing but a bed of roses, or that once a person truly comes to Christ and takes His yoke upon him, that his troubles are then at an end. Not so. Instead, there is a very real sense in which his troubles only then really begin. It is written, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Wearing the yoke of Christ unites us to Him, and union with Him brings us into “fellowship with His sufferings” now, as it also guarantees fellowship with His glory in the future. The members of Christ’s body share, in their measure, the experience of their Head. The world hated Him, and it hates those who bear His image. The world per-

secuted Him, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master. The more closely we walk with Christ, the more shall we bring down upon our heads the hostility of and opposition of Satan, for his rage is stirred up when he finds he has lost another of his captives.

Not only does the one who truly comes to Christ and takes upon him His yoke evoke the hatred and persecution of Satan and of a world which despises and rejects God's Son, but he is now the subject of inward conflicts and trials to which he was hitherto a stranger. That corrupt nature which was his when born into this world, is neither removed nor refined when he becomes a Christian. It remains within him, unchanged. Not only so, but he is now made more conscious of its presence and its vileness. Increasing light from God discovers what a mass of corruption indwells him. Moreover, that evil nature opposes every movement of the holy nature he received at the new birth: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). Now this discovery of the plague of his own heart and the consciousness that there is that within which is ever opposing all holy aspirations, preventing him from living as he would, is a source of deep anguish unto the child of God, so that he often finds himself crying, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

But again we would say: let us not be misunderstood at this point. While we cannot affirm that the Christian's life in this world is one of unclouded sunshine and unalloyed bliss, yet we must be careful lest we convey the impression that the believer's lot is far from being an envious one and that for the present he is worse off than the unbeliever. Far, very far from it. If the Christian is using diligently the means of God's appointing, if he draws upon the fullness which there is in Christ for him, if he cultivates daily communion with Him, if he walks in the path of His Commandments he will possess a peace which passes all understanding and experience such joys as the worldling knows nothing about. The world may frown upon and the Devil rage against him, but a conscience approving instead of condemning, the felt smile of God upon him, the sweet communion enjoyed with fellow believers, and the assurance of an eternity of bliss in the presence of his Beloved are ample compensations so that he would not, if he could, change places with a millionaire in his mansion or a king in his palace who was a stranger to Christ.

Let us now inquire, What is there in the yoke of Christ which makes such amends for the enmity it evokes and the suffering it entails, so that taking everything into consideration the believer will set to his seal that it *is* an "easy" one? In seeking to answer this question we shall again avail ourselves of the help furnished by John Newton's sermons, adopting his outline at least. First, those who wear the yoke of Christ *act from a principle* which makes all things easy. This is love. Any yoke will chafe when resisted, but even a cast-iron one would be pleasant if it were lined with felt and well padded with cotton-wool. And this it is which renders the yoke of Christ easy unto His people: it is lined with *love*—His to them, and theirs to Him. Whenever the shoulder becomes sore, look to the lining! Keep the lining right and the yoke will be no more a burden to us than wings are to a bird, or her wedding ring is to a bride.

We are told in Scripture that when Jacob served a hard master seven years for Rachel, that they seemed but a few days to him, "for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). What a difference it makes when we perform a difficult task whether it be done for a stranger or a dear friend, an exacting employer or a close relative. Affection makes the hardest job easy. But there is no love like unto that which a redeemed sinner bears to Him who bled and died in his place. We are will-

ing to do and suffer much in order to gain the affection of one whom we highly esteem, even though we are not sure of success; but when we know the affection is reciprocal, it gives added strength for the endeavour. And the believer does not love with uncertainty: he knows that Christ loved him before he had any love for the Saviour, yea, loved him even when his own heart was filled with enmity against Him. This love, therefore, supplies two sweet and effectual motives in service.

A desire to please. This is the question it is ever asking: What can I do to gratify, to make happy the object of my affection? Love is ever ready to do whatever it can, and regrets that it cannot do more. Neither time, difficulties nor expense concern the one whose heart is warmly engaged. But the world is not in the secret: they neither know nor appreciate the principles which motivate and actuate the people of God. Not only are they at a loss to understand why the Christian is no longer willing to join with them in the pleasures of sin, but they quite fail to see what satisfaction he can find in reading the Scriptures, secret prayer, or public worship. They suppose that some mental derangement is responsible, and advise him to leave such gloomy exercises to those who are on the verge of the grave. But the believer can give them a short answer: "the love of Christ constraineth me": I want to learn more of His wondrous love for me, and how I can more fully please and honour Him.

A pleasant assurance of acceptance. What a difference it makes when we are able to ascertain whether that which we do will be favourably received or not. If we have reason to fear that the one for whom we are working appreciates not our efforts, we find little delight in the task and are tempted to spare ourselves all we can. But if we have good reason to believe that our labours will meet with a smile of approval, how much easier is the labour and how much more readily will we do it with all our might. And it is this encouragement which stimulates Christ's disciples. They know that He will not overlook the smallest service undertaken in His name or the slightest suffering endured for His sake, for even a cup of cold water which is given on His account is accepted and acknowledged as though proffered immediately to Himself (Mark 9:41).

Second, service is made still easier and lighter if it is *agreeable to our inclinations*. Esau would probably have done anything to please his father in order to obtain the blessing, but no commandment could have been more agreeable to him than to be sent for venison, because he was a hunter and his pleasure lay in that direction (Gen. 25:27). Now the Christian has received from God a new nature, yea, he has been made "a partaker of the Divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and just as the magnetic needle ever points to the north star, so does this spiritual principle ever turn unto its Author. Consequently, God's Word is its food, communion with Him its desire, His Law its delight. True, he still groans under inward corruption, but these are part of sin's burden and no part of Christ's yoke, and he groans because he cannot serve Him better. But just so far as faith is in exercise, he rejoices in every part of Christ's yoke: the profession of His name is esteemed a holy privilege, His precepts are the subject of profitable meditation, suffering for Christ's sake is counted a high honour.

Third, the burden of Christ is found light because *sustaining grace* is vouchsafed to its wearer. Service to a loved one would be impracticable or impossible if you were yourself infirm and incapacitated. You could not take a long journey to minister unto a friend, no matter how dear he were to you, if you were crippled. But the yoke of Christ is easy in this respect, too, that He supplies sufficiency of strength to the bearer. What is hard to flesh and blood is easy to faith

and grace. It is true that apart from Christ the believer “can do nothing” (John 15:5), but it is equally true that he “can do all things” through Christ strengthening him (Phil. 4:13). It is true that “even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,” yet we are Divinely assured that “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; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:30, 31). What more can we ask? It is entirely our own fault if we are not “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10).

Whatever the Lord may call upon us to do, if we depend upon Him in the use of appointed means, He will most certainly qualify and equip us for it. He is no Pharaoh, requiring us to make bricks and providing no straw for the same. So far from it, He promises, “as thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25). Moses may complain, “I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue,” but the Lord assures him, “I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Exo. 4:10, 12). Paul acknowledged, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves”; yet he at once added, “but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5). So, too, whatever sufferings the Lord calls upon His people to endure for His sake, He will assuredly grant sustaining grace. “All power in Heaven and in earth” belongs unto Christ and therefore is He able to make our enemies flee before us and deliver from the mouth of the lion. Even though He permits His servants to be beaten and cast into prison, yet songs of praise are put into their mouths (Acts 16).

Finally, the easiness of Christ’s yoke appears in *the rich compensations accompanying it*. Under sin’s yoke we spent our strength for that which satisfies not, but when wearing Christ’s yoke, we find rest unto our souls. If we live the life of pleasing self and seeking our honour, then we reap misery and woe—but when self is denied and Christ is glorified—peace and joy is our portion. No man serves Christ for nought: in the keeping of His Commandments there is “great reward” (Psa. 19:11)—not of debt, but of grace. This is not sufficiently dwelt upon. There is a reward here and a reward hereafter. The Christian may have much to cast him down, but he has far more to cheer him up and send him on his way rejoicing. He has free access to the Throne of Grace, precious promises to rest upon, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit to comfort his soul. He has a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, a loving Father who supplies his every need, and the blessed assurance that when the appointed hour arrives he shall be removed to another world where there is no sin or sorrow, but “fullness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:11).—A.W.P.

COMFORT IN SORROW.

To Mrs. Polhill, on the death of a pious relative. Dear Madam: The trouble expressed in yours is a great addition to mine. The sovereignty of Divine wisdom and grace is all that I have at this day to retreat unto. May God direct you thereunto also, and you will find rest and peace. It adds to my trouble that I cannot possibly come down to you this week: nothing but engaged duty could keep me from you one hour, but I am conscious how little I can contribute to your guidance in this storm, or your satisfaction. Christ is your Pilot, and however the vessel is tossed while He seems to sleep, He will arise and rebuke these winds and waves in His own time. I have done it, and yet shall farther wrestle with God for you, according to the strength He is pleased to communicate. Little it is which at this distance I can mind you of, yet some few things are necessary.

Sorrow not too much for the dead: she is entered into rest, taken away from evil to come. Take heed, lest by too much grief, you too much grieve that Holy Spirit who is infinitely more to us than all natural relations. I blame you not that you so far attend to the call of God in this dispensation, as to search yourself, to judge and condemn yourself; grace can make it an evidence to you that you shall not be judged or condemned of the Lord. I dare not say this chastisement was not needful. We are not in heaviness unless need be; but if God be pleased to give you a discovery of the wisdom and care that is in it, and how needful it was to awaken and restore your soul in anything, perhaps in many things, in due time you will see grace and love in it also. I verily believe God expects, in thus dealing with you, that you should judge yourself, your sins, and your decays; but He would not have you misjudge your condition. We are like froward children, who, when they are rebuked and corrected, neglect other things, and only cry that their parents hate and reject them. You are apt to fear, to think and say, that you are one whom the Lord regards not, you are none of His, and that for sundry reasons which you suppose you can plead. But, saith God, This is not your business, this is a part of your stubbornness. I call you to quicken your grace, to amend your ways, and you think you have nothing to do but to question My love.

My dear sister, my child and care, beware you lose not the advantage of this dispensation; you will do so, if you use it only in afflictive sorrows, or questioning the love of God, or your interest in Christ. The time will be spent in these things, which should be taken up in earnest endeavours after a compliance with God's will, quickening of grace, returns after backslidings, mortification of sin, and love of the world, until the sense of it pass away. Labour vigorously to bring your soul to this twofold resolution. 1. That the will of God is the best rule for all things, and their circumstances. 2. That you bring yourself to a fresh engagement to live more to Him; and you will find the remainder of your work easy, for it is a part of the yoke of Christ. I shall trouble you no farther, but only to give you the assurance that you are in my heart continually, which is nothing, but it helps to persuade me you are in the heart of Christ, which is all. I am, dear Madam, your very affectionate servant, John Owen.

