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WORLDLY SORROW.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). We have already considered the nature of “godly sorrow” (see the “Godly Sorrow” articles in the May and June issues) and by what it is evidenced, namely, by a saving “repentance” or a forsaking of sin and turning unto God. It now remains for us to enquire wherein it differs from the “sorrow of the world.” This brings us to a vitally-important distinction, for all sorrow over sin is not a “godly” one, neither does it lead to evangelical repentance: evangelical repentance we say, for there is sometimes a repentance or remorse—as was displayed in the tragic case of Judas—which does not terminate in “salvation.” Such is “the sorrow of the world,” that is, the sorrow of the unregenerate, of those who are strangers unto the Lord. So far from their sorrow leading to life, it ends in death.

The sorrow of the world is the grief and mortification of disappointed worldlings, of those who know not God but whose trust is in themselves or in some arm of flesh. They have relied for prosperity from the world, and the world has sadly failed them. They have sought satisfaction from its broken cisterns, only to have their hopes dashed. The bitter springs from which their ambitions have proceeded are pride and carnal self-respect, and their motives and occasions for indulging the same are as manifold as the deceitful lusts of the flesh. But frustrated plans and defeated expectations sour and enrage, and nature’s greenness is turned into the drought of unrepentant grief. So far from leading the soul to God, it fills with wrath and enmity against Him. Its miserable subjects seek consolation from the world, endeavouring to drive away serious reflections by drowning themselves in its pleasures.

The sorrow of the world does not arise from just views of sin, nor does it proceed from any concern that God has been offended. It does not lead the soul to God in true penitence, nor turn to Him for consolation. The sorrow of the unregenerate is occasioned by temporal losses, which fill them with chagrin and dismay; by crimes which incur public disgrace for their perpetrators and their families; from the squandering of a goodly heritage which terminates in poverty and despair; from wandering from the path of chastity, and in consequence losing their good name among men: from intemperance and reckless living, which ends in ruined health and vain regrets for having played the fool. In all such cases there is no contrition of heart for having violated a righteous Law, offended a kind Creator, or been an occasion of stumbling to their fellows. It is only that they are incensed at the harvest which follows their evil sowing and fretful because lack of money or health prevents them from continuing such excesses.

There are some worldly men who experience religious convictions, and they are grieved because they cannot obtain Heaven in their own way. This is seen in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ, but who, when he learned that denying of self was required of him, “went away sorrowful” (Matt. 19:22). There are those who have a sense of eternity, and yet are wedded to their lusts. They desire happiness hereafter, but they will not forsake their idols now, and so they are troubled. They cannot have Christ and the world—Christ for their consciences—and the world for their affections. They are unwilling to break away from the love of this world so that they might be saved in the

world to come, and therefore are they grieved that they cannot have both. A pertinent case in point is that of Balaam.

Such "sorrow" as we have referred to in the above paragraph is but a superficial and transient emotion which has no lasting and spiritual effects. Alas, of its possessors it has to be said, "your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4). Their weeping eyes soon dry up, as we see in the cases of Esau and Ahab. Again—such sorrow is occasioned not by mourning over sin as sin, but over the retribution it brings. A solemn example of this appears in the life of Pharaoh when the Divine judgments were upon his kingdom: "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, Entreat the LORD, that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people" (Exo. 8:8). Note well it was not, "Entreat the LORD to remove my pride, my obstinacy, my hatred of His people; but only let the plague be stayed." Contrast the prayer of David under similar circumstances: "take away the iniquity of Thy servant" (2 Sam. 24:10)—not take away the pestilence from my land!

"The sorrow of the world worketh death" because that is the appointed and inevitable fruit of the impenitent workings of an unregenerate will. It is a great mistake to suppose that the natural tendency of trial and trouble, loss and pain, is unto good. Not so: their trend is rather to excite rebellion against God. It is only when our sufferings are Divinely sanctified to us that they are made to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Just as surely as happiness is the attendant of holiness, so misery is the certain entail of sin. When the worldling's dream of natural happiness has been dispelled by crime, by misfortune, or by the long-resisted Spirit of God, he feeds only on the sour bread of self-reproach and unblessed woe. He often willfully accelerates the desire for relief which he vainly hopes to find in death—which so far from ending his sorrow only conducts him into the blackness of darkness forever.

"The sorrow of the world worketh death"—temporal and eternal. "Death" is to be taken here in its widest latitude, including all the disastrous consequences of sin. The results of godly sorrow are salutary, the effects of worldly sorrow are abortive and evil. They produce only ill health and distress, and are attended with no consolation or compensation. The sorrow of the world debilitates the body, disturbs peace, impairs the mind, and breaks the spirit. There is no contrite seeking unto God on the part of the suffering one, but only a fretting and murmuring against Him. The more miserable a man becomes the harder his heart: "they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds" (Rev. 16:10, 11). Worldly sorrow is the certain prelude to desperation unless God prevents, as witness the horrible cases of Saul, and Ahithophel.

How important it is, then, that we should seek grace to turn all our mourning unto a spiritual channel, that we may sorrow "after a godly manner"—with grief for having dishonoured God with a dependence on His mercy, with a purpose to henceforth obey Him. Sorrow over sin and exercise about our eternal interests will avail us nothing unless it works repentance, and even repentance may be counterfeited and so not be "unto salvation." Unless sin be mourned over as the cause of all our suffering and God be viewed as the righteous yet merciful Author of the same, grief under afflictions produces only increasing enmity unto despair. If after prayerfully pondering these articles any of our readers are brought to grieve over the hardness of their hearts and are concerned because of

of their lack of godly sorrow, that is sure proof they are *not* devoid of this spiritual grace.—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

14. *Prayer*: Matthew 6:5-8.

As we pointed out in the opening paragraphs last month, we are now in the fourth division of our Lord's Sermon, a division which includes the first 18 verses of Matthew 6, the general subject of which is the performing of good works so as to secure the approbation of God. In order to this, His disciples must shun not only the false doctrines but also the evil practices of the scribes and Pharisees. The keynote is struck in the opening verse, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them" (R.V.). The general principle which is expressed in this warning is enlarged upon in verses 2-18, being applied to three specific cases: in "alms" manward, in "prayer" Godward, and in "fasting" selfward. Having already dwelt upon the first, we now turn unto what Christ here had to say upon the second. By keeping in mind the connection we shall the better perceive His scope and design, and be preserved from an erroneous interpretation of the clauses which are to be before us.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites (v. 5). The opening words make it quite clear that Christ takes it for granted His disciples *will pray*, and in what follows He reveals the need there is for them to be diligent to perform this duty in a way acceptable to God. When the Lord assured Ananias of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus He said, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). As a "Pharisee of the Pharisees" he had made many long prayers, but not until the miracle of grace had been wrought within him could it be said that he *prayed*. Saying prayers and pouring out the heart before God are totally different things: a self-righteous Pharisee may be diligent in the former, only one who has been born again will do the latter. As another has said, "The moment a spiritual babe is born into the new creation it sends up a cry of helpless dependence toward the source of its birth."

That which is now to engage our attention consists of the first recorded utterance of Christ on the subject of prayer, and it is most searching and solemn to note that it opens with a *warning against hypocrisy* in the discharge of this duty. That particular species of hypocrisy which is here rephended is ostentatiousness in our devotions, the public parading of our piety, the seeking to attract the notice of others and win for ourselves the reputation of great spirituality. Prayer is the expression of creature need and dependence and therefore it is utterly inconsistent with thoughts of pride and self-complacency. But alas, such is fallen man that he can unite these opposites, and therefore our need of this caution: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites." A "hypocrite" is one who assumes a character which does not belong to him. The "hypocrites" which Christ had immediately in view were the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13), for their "leaven" was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1).

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matt. 6:5). We need hardly say that Christ is not here condemning this posture of standing in prayer (for He Himself employed it: (John 11:41), nor is He forbidding His disciples to pray in public: Paul gave thanks unto God in the presence of a whole ship's company (Acts 27:35), and in his Epistles gave order that "men pray everywhere" (1 Tim. 2:8). No, rather was it the *motive and manner* of prayer which our Lord here had in view. It is a caution against vainglory, the seeking to commend ourselves unto our fellows. And what sort of creatures are we that

need this caution: think of it—praying to *God*, in order that we may be seen of *men*! In how many ways does the evil of our hearts lead us away from godly simplicity and sincerity.

Sin defiles our very devotions and unless we are very much on our guard, it will not only render them invalid, but an offense unto God. Particularly does the minister need to place a strict watch upon himself in his public praying, lest he be guilty of praying to the congregation rather than unto God. Alas, does not a spirit of hypocrisy often creep into the pulpit prayers of those who could not justly be called “hypocrites”? It is but natural that the minister should desire to be regarded as a highly spiritual man, as one who enjoys very close communion with God, whose aspirations of soul are of a most exalted order. It is no easy matter not to be mindful that there are many critical ears which are listening to our petitions and to be affected accordingly both in the matter and manner of our supplications. Would not our public prayers often be simpler and shorter if we were alone with God?

What need there is, then, that those who are accustomed to lead in public prayer should diligently examine their hearts and cry earnestly unto God for the mortifying of their pride. What is the good opinion of fellow-sinners worth if we have not the Lord’s “well done”? Let us be more careful in seeing to it that our affections prompt each petition, than in giving thought to the expressing of them in words which will charm the ears of men. Truth and sincerity in the heart are vastly more important than choice language or a correct demeanour. Let us seek grace to heed that exhortation, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God . . . Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in Heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl. 5:1, 2). If the Divine perfections duly impress our souls then we shall be saved from much folly.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father” (Matt. 6:6). Having condemned the vice of hypocrisy in the former verse our Lord now commended the virtue of sincerity, and instructs us in the right manner of praying to God. It seems strange that some have quite missed Christ’s meaning here, a few extremists supposing that He forbade all praying in the congregation. That which our Lord was reprehending in the previous verse was not public prayer, but personal praying in public which was done with the object of calling attention to ourselves. The Lord Jesus encouraged social praying in His memorable declaration, “where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst” (Matt. 18:20), which was specifically a promise to praying souls, having no reference at all to the Lord’s Supper. That united prayer was practiced by the early Christians is clear from many passages in the Acts: see 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; 12:5; 16:13.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6). In our exposition of Matthew 5 we have shown repeatedly that much of our Lord’s language in this Sermon cannot be understood literally, and if this principle be borne in mind we shall be preserved from unwarrantably restricting His scope and meaning in this verse. Viewed in the light of its immediate context we regard this verse as, first, giving most necessary directions to the one who leads in *public* prayer. So far from engaging therein in order to win human esteem, we must discharge the duty in precisely the same spirit of humility and sincerity as though we were alone, engaged in

private prayer. Entering the closet and closing the door was a figurative way of saying, shut out from thy mind all thoughts of the creature and have respect unto God alone: be not occupied with those present, but with Him who is invisible.

While we are satisfied that the first reference in verse 6 is to public prayer, yet (as the greater includes the less) there is also important teaching here concerning *private* prayer. Three things in it are to be noted: the place of prayer, the privacy, and privilege thereof. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet." By the "closet" we are to understand a place of seclusion and retirement. Our omniscient Saviour knew the tendency of our minds to stray, how easily our thoughts wander away from God, and therefore He exhorts us to get away from everything which disturbs and distracts, to some quiet spot where our communion with God may not be hindered. Private prayer is to be as secret as possible and this calls for a secluded spot, a place free from the observations and interruptions of our fellows. When Christ engaged in private prayer He withdrew from the crowd and retired to the solitude of the mountain.

Ere passing on it should be pointed out that we must be careful not to run to an unwarrantable extreme at this point, otherwise we should make this verse clash with other passages. If on the one hand we must be careful to avoid ostentation and seeking the praise of men, yet on the other we must be on our guard against intimidation and being unfaithful through the fear of men. Daniel closed not the windows of his room when praying, even though he knew that he was thereby endangering his life (6:10). Even when in a public place we should not allow the sneers of others to hinder us from bowing our heads and returning thanks to God at meal times, nor to kneel by our bedside at night if someone else be sharing the room.

"Enter into thy closet": these words suggest not only a silent and secluded place, but also a *stated* place—whether it be in the fields, the woods, or our own dwelling. When David received tidings of the death of Absalom, we are told that he "went up to the chamber over the gate" and wept (2 Sam. 18:33), as though that was the spot where he was accustomed to pour out his griefs unto the Lord. When the widow of Zarephath acquainted Elijah with the death of her son, the Prophet "carried him up into a loft where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed," and then and there "he cried unto the LORD" (1 Kings 17:19, 20). The same practice was evidently followed by our Saviour, for we read that He "went (for the specific purpose of making supplication to God) as He was wont (accustomed) to the Mount of Olives" (Luke 22:39).

It is interesting to note that the Greek word for "closet" occurs but four times in the original of the New Testament: in Matthew 24:26 it is translated "secret chambers." Our Lord's language was most probably adopted from Isaiah 26:20: "Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee." Now what would these words "enter into thy closet" suggest to a Jew? The "closet" is simply a closed place, shut in for privacy, shut out from obtrusion. What would such a term naturally suggest to Christ's hearers? There was one place in their midst which was pre-eminently a *secret chamber*, namely, the innermost section of the temple, where Jehovah had His special dwelling in the holy of holies. It was peculiarly a "closet," from which the people were excluded. It was a place marked by silence and secrecy, seclusion, and separation.

The holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple was of unique design. It had neither door nor window, and unlike the inner courts of Orientals which are opened to the sky, this one was roofed in and had no skylight. None of the Levites were permitted to enter,

save only the high priest, who went there as the representative of the nation to meet with God. Significantly enough there was in it but a single piece of furniture, namely, the sacred ark covered by the mercy-seat. How unspeakably blessed: Aaron drew nigh to converse with God at a blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. There was one notable exception to what we have just pointed out: “and when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him, then he heard the voice of One speaking unto him *from off the mercy-seat* that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim: and he spake unto him” (Num. 7:89). Thus the Holy “Closet” was where man spake to God and God to him.

There are two expressions in our verse which emphasize the note of *privacy* in our individual devotions: “when thou hast shut thy door” and “pray to thy Father who is in secret.” The former suggests the need for seclusion and silence—the getting away from all sights and sounds which would disturb and distract. The latter means, get alone with God, enter the secret place of the Most High, converse and commune with Him in the holy of holies. Let the reader carefully note the special stress which is here laid upon the singular number of the second personal pronoun: “but *thou*, when *thou* prayest, enter into *thou* closet,” etc. Here is something which is unique in all the Word of God: no less than eight times in this one verse is the second person used in the singular number. Nothing could bring out more strikingly the imperative need of being alone with God: for this the world must be entirely shut out.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.” How clear it is that both the spirit and the letter of this verse rebukes those misguided souls who clamour for churches and chapels to be kept perpetually open so that any member of the public may repair there for private devotions either day or night, as if buildings set apart for religious exercises were any nearer to the Throne of Grace than our own dwellings or the open fields. The Lord of Heaven and earth “dwelleth not in temples made with hands. . . He is not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:24, 27). The localization of worship was abolished when Christ declared, “The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. . . God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21, 24). The argument that church buildings should be kept open for the benefit of those away from home can have no weight in the face of Matthew 6:5, 6. Such an innovation is certain to be abused.

“Pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (v. 6). Here is set forth the holy and unspeakable privilege of prayer. Here we are invited to freely open our minds and hearts unto Him who cares for us, acquainting Him with our needs and cares, making known our requests with thanksgiving. “Pray to thy Father which is in secret”: He is invisible to carnal sight, imperceptible to our bodily senses, but a living Reality unto faith. We must therefore labour to come into His conscious presence, seek to acquaint ourselves with Him, and make Him real to our souls, for He is “a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek Him.” In order to this, after entering our closet and before offering up any petition, we need to meditate upon God’s wondrous perfections, to ponder His blessed attributes. Dwell upon His ineffable holiness, His almighty power, His unchanging faithfulness, His infinite mercy; above all rejoice in the fact that He is our *Father*.

“Pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” This is set over against “they have their reward” of verse 1. Their “reward” is not the approbation of God, but merely the worthless admiration of their silly dupes who are imposed upon by an outward show of piety. They “*have* their reward,” for there is nothing but the gall of bitterness awaiting them in the future: “men of the world have their portion in this life” (Psa. 17:14). Different far is it with the Christian. His prayers do not and cannot merit anything from God, yet if they are offered from right principles and unto right ends they are pleasing unto Him, and are rewarded even now by tokens of His favour, and in the Day to come they shall be openly approved by Him.

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matt. 6:7). That which our Lord here condemned is not our asking again and again for the same thing, but the reducing of the duty and privilege of prayer to a mere lip labour. In Psalm 119 we find David praying, “teach me Thy statutes” no less than seven times. Our Saviour in the Garden repeatedly asked for the removal of the cup, and Paul thrice besought the Lord for the departure of his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8). It is *vain* repetitions which is prohibited, such as those used by the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:26), the worshippers of Diana (Acts 19:34), and the papists’ “Pater-nosters” and “Ave-marias,” which they are taught to use without meaning or devotion, and which they number by counting strings of beads [the rosary]. Cold and formal extempore prayers are equally forbidden, for they are mere babblings.

“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him” (Matt. 6:8). Here Christ presents as an inducement to praying souls the very reason which infidels use as an argument against prayer: if God be omniscient, what need is there for us to inform Him of our requirements? We do not present our requests to God in order to acquaint Him with our wants, but to render obedience unto His commandment which requires this duty from us. We pray unto God for the purpose of honouring Him, acknowledging Him to be the Knower of our hearts and the Giver of all mercies. Moreover, prayer is a means for us to rightly receive and improve the gifts of Heaven, being an indispensable preparation of our soul thereto. It should be understood that this knowledge of our Father’s is far more than a bare cognition of our wants: it is such a solicitation for our welfare that ensures the supply of every needed thing.—A.W.P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

7. At Zarephath.

“He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa. 28:16). This is a rule which it is both our wisdom and welfare to heed in all the varied details of our lives—never more needed by God’s people than in this mad age of speed and hurry. Most profitably may we apply it to our reading and study of God’s Word. It is not so much the amount of time we spend upon the Scriptures as it is the measure in which we prayerfully *meditate* upon that which is immediately before us. *That* largely determines the degree of benefit the soul receives therefrom. By passing too quickly from one verse to another, by failing to vividly picture before our minds the details before us, and by not taking pains to discover the practical lessons which may be drawn from historical events, we are greatly the losers. It is by putting ourselves in the position of the one we are reading about and thinking what we would most likely have done in such circumstances, that we receive the most help.

An illustration of what we have in view in the above paragraph is supplied by the stage we have now reached in the life of Elijah. Last month we arrived at the point where, “It came to pass after a while, that the brook *dried up*”: let us not be in too big a hurry to turn unto what follows rather should we endeavour to visualize the Prophet’s situation and ponder the trial which confronted him. Picture the Tishbite there in his lowly retreat. Day by day the water in the brook steadily diminished: did his hopes do likewise? Did his songs of worship become feebler and less frequent as the streamlet rolled less noisily over its rocky bed? Was his harp hung upon the willows as he gave himself up to anxious thought and restlessly paced to and fro? There is nothing in Scripture to intimate any such thing. God keeps in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed upon Himself. Yes—but in order thereto, the heart must steadfastly confide in Him.

Ah, that is the very point: do we *trust the Lord* in trying circumstances or are we merely “fair-weather Christians.” It is much to be feared that had *we* been there by the drying brook, our minds had been distracted, and instead of waiting patiently for the Lord, had fretted and schemed, wondering what we had better do next. And then one morning Elijah awoke to find the brook altogether dried up and his supply of sustenance completely cut off! What then should he do? Must he remain there and perish? for he could not expect to live long without something to drink. Must he not now take matters into his own hands and do the best he could for himself? Would it not be better to retrace his steps and risk the vengeance of Ahab than remain where he was and die of thirst? Can we doubt that Satan plied him with such temptations in his hour of testing?

The Lord had ordered him, “hide thyself by the brook Cherith,” adding, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there*”; and it is striking and blessed to see that he *remained* there even after his supply of water had ceased. The Prophet did not move his quarters until he received definite instruction from the Lord to do so. It was thus with Israel of old in the wilderness, as they journeyed to the promised land: “At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and the cloud was

taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night . . . two days or a month, or a year . . . the children of Israel abode in their tents and journeyed not” (Num. 9:18-22). And that is expressly recorded for *our* instruction and comfort, and it is both our wisdom and welfare to heed the same.

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath” (1 Kings 17:8, 9). Did not this show plainly how worthless and needless was any carnal scheming on the part of the Prophet, had he indulged in such. God had *not* “forgotten to be gracious,” nor would He leave His servant without the needed direction or guidance when His time had arrived to grant the same. How loudly ought this to speak unto our hearts! we who are far too full of *our* own plans and devisings. Instead of heeding that injunction, “my soul, wait thou only upon God,” we contrive some way of getting out of our difficulties and then ask the Lord to prosper the same. If a Samuel does not arrive just when we expect, then we try to force things (1 Sam. 13:12).

But let it be duly noted that before God’s word came afresh to Elijah both his faith and his patience had been put to the proof. In going to Cherith, the Prophet had acted under Divine orders, and therefore was he under God’s special care. Could he, then, come to any real harm under such guardianship? He must therefore remain where he is until God directs him to leave the place, no matter how unpleasant conditions may become. So with us. When it is clear that God has placed us where we are, there we must “abide” (1 Cor. 7:20), even though our continuance in it be attended with hardships and apparent hazard. If, on the other hand, Elijah had left Cherith of his own accord, how could he count upon the Lord being with him and either provide for his wants or deliver him from his enemies? The same applies to us with equal force today.

We are now to consider the further provision which the Lord graciously made for His servant in his retirement. “And the word of the LORD came unto him.” How often has His word come to us: sometimes directly, sometimes through one of His servants, and we have wickedly refused to obey it. If not in actual words, our ways have been like that of the rebellious Jews, who in response to the affectionate remonstrance of Jeremiah replied, “As for the words that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee” (44:16). On other occasions we have been like those spoken of in, “They sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they *do them not*” (Ezek. 33:31, 32). And why? Because the Word of God crosses our perverse wills and requires what is contrary to our natural inclinations.

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there” (1 Kings 17:8, 9). This meant that Elijah must be disciplined by still further trials and humblings. First of all, the name of the place to which God ordered His servant to go is deeply suggestive, for “Zarephath” means “refining,” coming from a root that signifies a crucible—the place where metals are melted. There lay before Elijah not only a further testing of his faith, but also the *refining* of it, for a “crucible” is for the purpose of separating dross from the fine gold. The experience which now confronted our Prophet was a very trying and distasteful one to flesh and blood, for to go from Cherith to Zarephath involved a journey of a hundred miles across

the desert. Ah, the place of refining is not easily reached and involves that from which all of us naturally shrink.

It is also to be carefully noted that Zarephath was “in Zidon”: that is to say, it was in the territory of the Gentiles, outside the land of Palestine. Our Lord threw emphasis on this detail (in His first public address) as being one of the earliest intimations of the favours which God purposed to extend unto the Gentiles, saying, “there were many widows in Israel” at that time (Luke 4:25, 26), who might (or might not) have gladly sheltered and succored the Prophet; but unto none of them was he sent—what a severe reflection on the chosen Nation to pass them by! But what is yet more remarkable is the fact that “Zidon” was the very place from which Jezebel, the wicked corrupter of Israel, had come (1 Kings 16:31)! How passing strange are the ways of God! yet ever ordered by infinite wisdom. As good old Matthew Henry says, “To show Jezebel the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding place for His servant even in her country.”

Equally striking is it to observe the particular person whom God selected to entertain Elijah. It was not a rich merchant or one of the chief men of Zidon, but a poor widow—desolate and dependent—who was made both willing and able to minister unto him. It is usually God’s way, and to His glory, to make use of and place honour upon “the weak and foolish things of this world.” In commenting upon the “ravens” which brought bread and flesh to the Prophet while he sojourned by the brook, we called attention to the sovereignty of God and the strangeness of the instruments He is pleased to employ. The same truth is vividly illustrated here: a poor widow! a Gentile dwelling in Zidon, the original home of Jezebel! Think it not strange then, my reader, if God’s dealings with you have been the very opposite of what you had expected. The Lord is a law to Himself, and implicit trust and unreserved submission is what He requires from us.

“Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:9). Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity: when Cherith is dried up then shall Zarephath be opened. How this should teach us to refrain from being concerned about the future. Remember, dear reader, that tomorrow will bring with it tomorrow’s God. “Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness” (Isa. 41:10): make these sure and certain promises—for they are the Word of Him that cannot lie—the stay of your soul; make them your reply to every question of unbelief and every foul aspersion of the Devil. Observe that once more God sent Elijah not to a river but a “brook”—not to some wealthy person with great resources, but to a poor widow with scanty means. Ah, the Lord would have His servant remain a pensioner upon Himself and as much dependent on *His* power and goodness as before.

This was indeed a severe testing of Elijah, not only to take a long journey through the desert but to enter into an experience which was entirely opposed to his natural feelings, his religious training, and spiritual inclinations—to be made dependent upon a Gentile in a heathen city. He was required to leave the land of his fathers and sojourn at the headquarters of Baal-worship. Let us duly weigh this truth that God’s plan for Elijah demanded from him unquestioning *obedience*. They who would walk with God must not only trust Him implicitly but be prepared to be entirely regulated by His Word. Not only must our faith be trained by a great variety of providences, but our obedience by the Divine commandments. Vain is it to suppose that we can enjoy the smile of Jehovah unless we be in subjection to His precepts. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to

hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). As quickly as we become disobedient our communion with God is broken and chastisement becomes our portion.

Elijah must go and dwell at Zarephath. But how could he subsist there when he knew no one in that place? Why, the same One who had given him this order had also made arrangements for his reception and maintenance. “Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.” This does not necessarily mean that the Lord had acquainted her with His mind—the sequel plainly shows otherwise. Rather do we understand those words to signify that God had appointed it in His counsels and would effect it by His providences—compare His, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee” (1 Kings 17:4). When God calls any of His people to go to a place, they may rest assured that He has fully provided for them in His fore-determined purpose. God secretly disposed this widow to receive and sustain His servant. All hearts are in the Lord’s hand and He turns them wheresoever He pleases. He can incline them to show us favour and do us acts of kindness even though we be strangers to them. Many times, in widely different parts of the world, has this been the experience of this writer.

Not only was the faith and obedience of Elijah tested by God’s call for him to go to Zarephath, but his humility was also put to the proof. He was called to receive charity at the hands of a desolate widow. How humbling to pride to be made dependent upon one of the poorest of the poor. How withering to all self-confidence and self-sufficiency to accept relief from one who did not appear to have sufficient for her own urgent needs. Ah, it takes pressure of circumstances to make us bow to what is repugnant to our natural inclinations. More than once in the past did we feel it acutely to receive gifts and succor from those who had very little of this world’s goods, but we were comforted by that word, “And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities . . . and many others which ministered unto Him of their substance” (Luke 8:2, 3). The “widow” speaks of weakness and desolation: Israel was widowed at this time and therefore Elijah was made to feel it in his own soul.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath” (1 Kings 17:10). In this Elijah gave proof that he was indeed the servant of God, for the path of a servant is the path of obedience: let him forsake that path and he ceases to be a servant. The servant and obedience are as inseparably linked together as the workman and work. Many today talk about their service for Christ as though He needed their assistance, as though His cause would not prosper unless they patronized and furthered it—as though the holy ark must inevitably fall to the ground unless their unholy hands uphold it. This is all wrong, seriously wrong—the product of Satan-fed pride. What is so much needed (by us!) is service *to* Christ—submission *to* His yoke, surrender *to* His will, subjection *to* His commandments. Any “Christian service” other than walking in His precepts is a human invention, fleshly energy, “strange fire.”

“So he arose and went to Zarephath.” How can I minister the holy things of God unless I be myself treading the path of obedience? The Jew of Paul’s day was very self-important, yet he brought no glory unto God. “And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish” (Rom. 2:19, 20). And then the Apostle puts him to the test: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?” (v. 21). The principle there enunciated is a searching one and one of wide application. By it each of us who preach the Gospel should diligently measure him-

self. You that preach that God requires Truth in the inwards parts, are you a man of your word? You that teach we should provide things honest in the sight of all men, have you any unpaid debts? You that exhort believers to be importunate in prayer, spend you much time in the secret place? If not, be not surprised if your sermons meet with little response.

From the pastoral peace of Gilead to the exacting ordeal of confronting the king: from the presence of Ahab to the solitude of Cherith: from the dried-up brook to Zarephath—the disturbances and displacements of Providence are a necessity if our spiritual lives are to prosper. “Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel” (Jer. 48:11). The figure used here is very suggestive. Because Moab had long been at peace she had become lethargic and flabby. Or, like grape juice unrefined, she had been spoilt. God was emptying Elijah “from vessel to vessel” so that the scum might rise to the surface and be removed. This stirring of our nest, this constant changing of our circumstances, is not a pleasant experience, but it is essential if we are to be preserved from “settling on our lees.” But alas, so far from appreciating the gracious designs of the Refiner, how often we are petulant and murmur when He empties us from vessel to vessel.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath.” He made no demur, but did as he was told. He made no delay, but set off on his long and unpleasant journey at once. He was as ready to go on foot as though God had provided a chariot. He was as ready to cross a desert as if God had bidden him luxuriate in a shady garden. He was as ready to apply for succor from a Gentile widow as if God had told him to return to his friends in Gilead. It might appear to carnal reason that he was putting his head into the lion’s mouth—courting certain disaster by making for the land of Zidon, where the agents of Jezebel would be numerous. But since God had bidden him to go, it was right for him to comply (and wrong not to do so), and therefore he could count upon the Divine protection.

Let it be duly noted that the Lord gave Elijah no more information as to his future residence and maintenance than that it was to be at Zarephath and by a widow. In a time of famine we should be profoundly thankful that the Lord provides for us at all, and be quite content to leave the mode of doing so with Him. If the Lord undertakes to guide us in our life’s journey, we must be satisfied with His doing it step by step. It is rarely His way to reveal to us much beforehand. In most cases we know little or nothing in advance. How can it be otherwise if we are to walk by *faith*! We must trust Him implicitly for the full development of His plan concerning us. But if we are really walking with God, taking heed to our ways according to His Word, He will gradually make things plain. His providences will clear up our difficulties, and what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Thus it was with Elijah.—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

3. *Its Nature.*

Spiritual good is holiness, and holiness consists of supreme love of God and equal love of men. Fallen man, alone and of himself, is utterly unable to love God with all his soul and strength and his neighbour as himself. This principle of holy love is completely absent from his heart, nor can he by any effort beget such an affection within himself. He is utterly unable to originate within his will any inclination or disposition that is spiritually good: he has not the moral power to do so. Moral power is nothing more nor less than a holy nature with holy dispositions; it is the perception of the beauty and the response of the heart to the excellence and glory of God, and the consequent subjection of the will to His royal law of liberty. "Spiritual perceptions, spiritual delight, spiritual choice, these and these alone, constitute ability to good" (J. Thornwell).

In our efforts to carefully define and describe the precise character of fallen man's inability to do anything which is pleasing to God, we have shown, first, that the impotency under which he now labours is a *penal* one, judicially inflicted upon him by the righteous Judge of all the earth, because of his misuse of the faculties and strength with which he was originally endowed in Adam. Second, that his spiritual helplessness is a *moral* one, having its seat in the soul or moral nature. The principle of holiness was lost by man when he apostatized from his Maker and Governor, and the principle of sin entered his soul, corrupting the whole of his being, so that he is no longer capable of rendering any spiritual obedience to the Moral Law: that is, obeying it from *spiritual* motives and with spiritual designs.

We pass on now to show, third, that fallen man's inability is a *voluntary* one. Some of our readers who have no difficulty in following us thus far, are likely to demur here—though the great majority, we doubt not, will apprehend this article more easily than the two preceding ones. We refer to hyper-Calvinists who have such a one-sided conception of man's spiritual helplessness that, really, they have lapsed into serious error. They look upon the condition and case of the sinner much as they do those people who have suffered a stroke which has paralyzed their limbs—as a calamity and not the result of a crime—as something which necessitates a state of inertia and inactivity, as something which annuls their responsibility. They fail to see that the moral impotency of the natural man is a *deliberate* one, and therefore one which is highly culpable.

Before appealing to the Scriptures for proofs of this third point, we must explain the sense in which we use our term. In affirming that the moral and sinful inability of fallen man is a *voluntary* one, we mean that he acts freely and spontaneously, unforced either from within or without. This is an essential element of an accountable being, everywhere recognized and acknowledged among men. Human law (much less Divine) does not hold a person to be guilty if he has been compelled by others to do wrong against his own will and protests. In all moral action the human will is self-inclined, acting freely according to the dictates of the mind, which are in turn regulated by the inclinations of the heart. Though the mind be darkened and the heart corrupted, nevertheless, the will acts freely and the individual remains a voluntary agent.

Some of the best theologians have drawn a distinction between the "liberty" and "ability" of the sinner's will, affirming the former but denying the latter. We believe this distinction to be an accurate and helpful one. Unless a person be free to exercise volitions as he pleases, he would not be an accountable being. Nevertheless, fallen man cannot, by

any exercise of will, change his nature or make any choice contrary to the governing tendencies of indwelling sin: he is totally lacking any disposition to meet the requirements of the Moral Law, and therefore he cannot make himself willing to so do. The affections of the heart and the perceptions of the mind regulate our volitions and the will has no inherent power to change our affections: we cannot by any resolution however strong or prolonged, make ourselves love what we hate or hate what we love.

Because the sinner acts without any external compulsion, acts according to his own inclinations, his mind is free to consider and weigh the various motives which come before it, making its own preferences or choices. By "motives" we mean those reasons or inducements which are presented to the mind tending to lead to choice and action. The power or force of these "inducements" lie not in themselves (abstractedly considered), but in the state of the person who is the subject of them. Consequently, that which would be a powerful motive in the view of one mind, would have no weight at all in the view of another. For example the offer of a bribe would be a sufficient motive to induce one judge to decide a case contrary to law and against the evidence; whereas to another such an offer, so far from being a motive to such an evil course, would be highly repulsive.

Let this be clearly grasped by the reader: those external inducements which are presented to the mind affect a person according to the state of his or her heart. The temptation presented by Potiphar's wife, which was firmly refused by Joseph, would have been a motive of sufficient power to have ruined many a youth of less purity of heart. External motives can have no influence over the choice and conduct of men except as they make an appeal to desires already existing in the mind. Throw a lighted match into a barrel of gunpowder and there is at once an explosion; but throw that match into a barrel of water and no harm is done. "The Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30) said the Holy One of God—none among the children of men can make such a claim.

All the affections of the human heart are, in their very nature, free. The idea of *compelling* a man to love or hate any object is manifestly absurd. The same holds good of all his faculties: conscience may be enlightened and made more sensitive, or it may be resisted and hardened, but no man can be compelled to act contrary to its dictates without depriving him of his freedom, and at the same time of his responsibility. So of his will or volition: two or more alternatives confront a man, conflicting motives are presented to his mind, and his will is quite free in making a preference or choice between them. Nevertheless, it is the very nature of his will to choose that which is preferable, that which is most agreeable to his heart. Consequently, though the will acts freely, it is *biased* by the corruptions of the heart, and therefore is unable to choose spiritual good. The heart must be changed before the will chooses God.

Against our assertion that the spiritual impotency of fallen man is a voluntary one, it may be objected that the sinner is so strongly tempted, so powerfully influenced by Satan, and is so thoroughly under his control, that (in many instances, at least) he cannot help himself, being irresistibly drawn into sinning. That there is some force in this objection is readily granted, but the length to which it is carried we can by no means allow. However subtle the craft, however influential the sophistry, however great be the power of the Devil, yet these must not be used so as to repudiate our personal responsibility and criminality in sinning, nor must we construe ourselves into being Satan's innocent dupes or unwilling victims. Never does Scripture so represent the matter: rather are we there

told "resist the Devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), and if we seek grace to meet the conditions (specified in 1 Peter 5:8, 9), then God will assuredly make good His promise.

Satan's power is not physical, but moral. He has an intimate access to the faculties of our souls, and though he cannot (like the Holy Spirit) work at their roots so as to change and transform their tendencies, he can ply them with representations and delusions which effectually incline them to will and do according to his good pleasure. He can cheat the understanding with appearances of truth, fascinate the fancy with pictures of beauty, and mock the heart with semblances of good. By a secret suggestion he can give an impulse to our thoughts and turn them into channels which subserve the purposes of his malignity. But in all of this he does no violence to the laws of our nature. He disturbs neither the spontaneity of the understanding nor the freedom of the will. He cannot make us do a thing without our own consent, and *in consenting to his evil suggestions* lies our guilt.

That sinners act freely and voluntarily in all their wrong-doing is everywhere taught in the Scriptures. Take first of all the horrible state of the heathen, a dark picture of which is painted for us in the first chapter of Romans. There we behold the consummation of human depravity. Heathenism, be it stated, is the full development of the principle of sin in its workings upon the intellectual, moral, and religious nature of man. In Romans 1 we are shown that the dreadful condition in which the heathen now lie (and missionaries bear clear witness that what comes before their notice accurately corresponds to what is here stated) is the consequence of their own voluntary choice. "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God" (v. 21). They changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man" etc. (v. 23). They "changed the Truth of God into a lie" (v. 25). They "*did not like to retain God in their knowledge*" (v. 28).

Nor was it any different with the favoured people of Israel. So averse were they to God and His ways that they hated, persecuted, and slew those messengers which He sent to reclaim them from their wickedness. "They kept not the covenant of God, and *refused to walk in His law*" (Psa. 78:10). They said, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go" (Jer. 2:25). "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken" (Jer. 6:16, 17). The Lord called unto them, but they "refused." He stretched forth His hand, but "no man regarded." They set at nought all His counsel, and would none of His reproofs (Prov. 1:24, 25). "The LORD God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending . . . But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His Prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15, 16).

Nor did God's blessed Son receive any better treatment at their hands. Though He appeared before them in "the form of a *servant*." He suited not their proud hearts. Though He was "full of grace and truth," they despised and rejected Him. Though He sought only their good, they returned Him nothing but evil. Though He proclaimed glad tidings unto them, they refused to hearken thereto. Though He wrought the most wonderful miracles before them, yet they would not believe Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). Their language was, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). It was a voluntary and deliberate refusal of Him. It is this very

voluntariness of their sin which shall be charged against them in the day of judgment, for then shall He give orders, "But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before Me" (Luke 19:27).

And from whence did such wicked treatment of the Son of God proceed? Why, from the vile corruptions of their own hearts. "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25) declared the incarnate Son of God. There was absolutely nothing whatever either in His character or conduct which merited their wicked contempt and enmity. Did anyone force them to be of such an abominable disposition? Surely not: they were *heartly* in it. Were they forced to such vileness *against their wills*? No indeed. They were voluntary in their wicked hatred of Christ. They loved darkness. They were infatuated by their corruptions and delighted in gratifying the same. They were highly pleased with false prophets, because they preached in their favour, flattering them and gratifying their evil hearts. And they hated whatever was disagreeable to their depraved tastes and which condemned their evil ways.

It was the same with those who heard the ambassadors of Christ—except for those in whom a sovereign God wrought a miracle of grace. Jews and Gentiles alike willfully opposed and rejected the Gospel. In some cases their hatred of the Truth was less openly manifested than in others, nevertheless it was just as real. And their disrelish of and opposition to the Gospel was entirely voluntary on the part of its enemies. Did not the Jewish leaders act freely when they threw Peter and John into prison? Did not the murderers of Stephen act freely when they "stopped their ears and ran upon him with one accord?" (Acts 7:57). Did not the Philippians act freely when they "rose up together" against Paul and Silas, beat, and cast them into prison?

The same thing obtains everywhere today. If the Gospel of Christ is preached in its purity and all its glory, it gains not the regard of the masses who hear it: instead, as soon as the sermon is over, like the generality of the Jews in our Lord's day, they "make light of it and go their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise" (Matt. 22:5). They are too indifferent to seek after obtaining even a doctrinal knowledge of the Truth. There are many who regard this sottishness of the unsaved as mere indifference, but it is actually something far worse: it is dislike of the heart for God, deliberate opposition to Him. "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will *not* hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely" (Psa. 58:4, 5). As Paul declared in his day, "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have *they* closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted" (Acts 28:27).

"They say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21:14). Such is the desperately wicked state of man's heart: diametrically opposite to the Divine excellence. Yet when this solemn truth is pressed upon the unregenerate, many of them will strongly object, denying that there is any such obstinacy in their hearts, saying, I have never hated God, but have always loved Him. Thus do they flatter themselves and seek to make themselves out to be far otherwise than they are. Nor are they wittingly lying when they make such a claim: rather are they utterly *mised* by their deceitful hearts. The scribes and Pharisees verily thought that they loved God, and that had they lived in the days of their forefathers, they had not put the Prophets to death (Matt. 23:29, 30). They were altogether insensible to their fearful and inveterate enmity

against God; nevertheless it was there, and later unmistakably displayed itself, when they hounded the Son of God to death.

And why was it that the scribes and Pharisees were quite unconscious of the opposition of their hearts to the Divine nature? It was because they had erroneous notions of the Divine Being, and loved only that false image which they had framed in their own imaginations; and therefore they had false conceptions of the Prophets which their fathers hated and murdered, and hence supposed *they* would have loved them. But when God was manifested in Christ they hated Him with bitter hatred. In like manner there are multitudes of sinners at ease in Zion today, millions in Christendom who persuade themselves that they truly love God, when in reality they *hate* Him; and the hardest of all tasks confronting the ministers of Christ is to shatter this cherished delusion and bring their unsaved hearers face to face with the horrible reality of their unspeakably vile condition.

Loudly as our deluded fellow-creatures may now boast of their loving of the Divine nature, as soon as they pass out of time into eternity and discover what God is, their spurious love immediately vanishes and their enmity bursts forth in full force. Sinners today perceive not their contrariness to the Divine nature, because they are utterly ignorant of the true God. It must be so, for a sinful nature and holy nature are diametrically opposite. Christendom has invented a false "God": a "God" without any sovereign choice, a "God" who loves all mankind, a "God" whose justice is swallowed up in His mercy.

Were they acquainted with the God of Holy Writ—who "hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 5:5), who will one day appear "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not Himself and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:8, 9)—they, if they honestly examined their hearts, would be conscious of the hatred they bear Him.—A.W.P.

PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS.

“Forgive us our sins” (Luke 11:4). In view of a serious error which has been accepted by not a few professing Christians, we feel that a more detailed consideration of these words is needed than we were able to give them in our current article on Matthew 6:9-13. This error is that it is wrong for believers to ask God to pardon their sins, that it is highly dishonouring to Christ for them to do so. It may strike most of our readers as strange that any who claim to be the Lord’s people should object to the using of this petition in the Family prayer: their own spiritual instincts (a burdened conscience seeking relief, and a tender heart grieved over offending a gracious God) and the clear testimony of Scripture thereon should prevent such a foolish mistake. Yet there are those who insist that a justified person ought not to pray for the pardon of his sins, since this is what God has already granted him.

Those errorists to whom we are here alluding suppose that it is as unnecessary and absurd for them to now ask God to forgive their trespasses as it would be to make request that He should choose them to eternal life, or that Christ should now render satisfaction (make an atonement) to Divine justice for the sins of His people, which He has already done. Now it is a glorious fact that the believer in Christ has been “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39) and that he “shall not come into condemnation” (John 5:24). Nevertheless these blessed declarations of the Gospel must not be used so as to nullify other aspects of the Truth equally important and vital: “having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13) must not be interpreted in a manner which sets aside, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Any difficulty which the reader may experience at this point will disappear if it be borne in mind that no such idea is presented anywhere in the Scriptures as a pardon of all sins, past, present, and to come.

Before turning to the constructive side of our subject let us seek to point out wherein the above error lies. First, it is due to confounding the purpose of God with the actual execution of the same. That all the sins of believers are pardoned in the everlasting counsels of God is blessedly true, yet our sins are not actually pardoned until we repent of the same. God determined to create from all eternity, but that determination was only realized when “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) of time, the heavens and the earth were actually brought into existence. God decreed the regeneration of His people, who suffered spiritual death in Adam, yet that decree is only made effectual when they are personally born again. In like manner, God willed the remission of all the sins of His people, but that decree is executed gradually, daily—as they sin and repent of the same. To talk of eternal justification or forgiveness is as senseless as to speak of eternal creation or regeneration.

Second, the above error grows out of a failure to distinguish between the impetration of Christ’s atonement and the application of the same unto believers. Throughout His life, and particularly so in His death, the Lord Jesus made full and perfect satisfaction unto Divine justice on behalf of all His people’s liabilities; but when do they actually enter into the good of the same? By nature they are “the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:3). On the other hand, “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1): but we enter Christ by a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)—it is only *then* that we gain access to the riches of the spiritual realm. Even then, we have to sue out our interest in Christ. There is now “a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of (the heavenly) Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1):

to that fountain we need to have continual recourse that we may be washed from our uncleanness.

Third, the above error arises from a failure to perceive the way wherein God gives pardon. This is not only in a way of grace, but of holiness, too. In the pardoning of sin the Lord never makes light of its enormity. Very much to the contrary. The Cross of Calvary makes unmistakably evident the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of Heaven. Nor is that all. It is the special office of the Holy Spirit to convict the sinner of the heinousness of his rebellion against God, and this He does by enlightening his understanding, softening his heart, and searching his conscience. In God's light we are given to see light, so that the vileness of our condition and the excuselessness of our conduct is borne in upon us. The result is that we are pierced to the quick, made to mourn for our transgressions against a holy and gracious God, and are brought to genuine repentance before Him. Then are we in a fit state to receive His mercy.

The testimony of Scripture is harmonious throughout that repentance on the part of the sinner ever precedes the actual bestowment of pardon by God. "If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me, and that I have also walked contrary unto them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then, their uncircumcised hearts *be humbled*, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember My covenant" (Lev. 26:40-42). "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long . . . I acknowledged my sin unto Thee and mine iniquity have I not hid . . . And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa. 32:3, 5). "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). Alas that such verses as these have no place in most of the "evangelistic" activity of our day. Alas that so few of God's own people are now being taught that He requires them to daily renew their repentance.

God will not suffer His saints to lie down in their sins as the sow does in the mire. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). On a previous occasion we have called attention to the significant fact that this petition in the Family prayer opens with the word "And," thus connecting it with the previous request: "Give us this day our daily bread *and* forgive us." Among other things this teaches us that we are just as much in need of daily forgiveness as we are of daily sustenance. The best of God's children is not so fully sanctified in this life but there is still that in him which needs Divine pardon: "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20)—both by omission and commission. Even though by grace we have a conscience void of offense both toward God and man, nevertheless we still need to pray, "Cleanse Thou me from secret (unknown) faults."

It is plain from Holy Writ that it has been the practice of the saints in all ages to pray for the pardon of their sins. To mention but two cases David prayed, "For Thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa. 25:11), yet in this very Psalm we find him expressing himself as a justified person: "O my God, I trust in Thee . . . Thou art the God of my salvation" (vv. 2, 5). Again we find him praying, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psa. 51:1), and this after having received a

definite intimation from God through Nathan, "The Lord *also hath* put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13). So, too, Daniel made request: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive" (9:19). To these may be added all those passages where believers prayed for salvation, which necessarily included an asking for the pardon of sins.

Let us now carefully inquire as to *what it* is we beg for when we ask for the forgiveness of our sins. First, for the grant of a Divine pardon. It is true that our justification may rightly be considered as an immanent act in the mind of God, that is, that from eternity He purposed not to impute sin unto His people; nevertheless Christ's righteousness is not applied unto them until they repent and believe. In this connection it is striking to note that Paul, when in a justified state, expressed his earnest desire, "That I *may* win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God" (Phil. 3:9). The Lord Jesus made a perfect satisfaction unto God which was accepted by Him, and therefore He was entitled to be received into Heaven and there administer His mediatory kingdom. Yet God required Him to sue out the fruits of His purchase: "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance" (Psa. 2:8). And so we are to ask for our right: "I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psa. 32:5). What consequence is to be drawn? This, "for this shall everyone that is godly pray unto Thee" (v. 6).

Though God be so ready to forgive yet He requires us to call upon Him and *seek* this (as all other blessings) at His hand. Why so? Because He deals with us as a Sovereign, and therefore does He require an humble submission from us, seeking in the terms of grace. Christ was not a Mediator of our choosing, but of God's, and therefore though justice has been fully satisfied yet the debt must be sincerely and contritely *owned* by us. Moreover, in our begging for Divine mercy we are to confess our own misery and poverty, that we are utterly unable to make any satisfaction ourselves. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1), and God requires us to acknowledge our complete dependence upon the advocacy of Christ. Though God provided a remedy for the bitten Israelites, yet in order to benefit therefrom they must *look unto* the brazen serpent (Num. 21:8). So it is with us now.

In this asking of God to grant us a pardon for Christ's sake we make request that He would not lay to our charge those sins which we daily commit, saying with the Psalmist, "enter not into judgment with Thy servant" (143:2), for Thou hast entered into judgment with Thy Son and laid upon Him all the iniquities of Thy people. "If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark (Hebrew: "impute") iniquities, O LORD who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared" (Psa. 130:3, 4). We therefore pray that God would not visit upon us the punishment which our transgressions deserve, but that on the ground of Christ's sacrifice it may be remitted us. This petition also includes the request that it may please God to spare us the governmental consequences of our sins, and that He will restore us unto full communion with Himself.

Second, in praying for the forgiveness of our sins we ask for a continuation of God's pardon. As in connection with the supply of our temporal needs we ask for a continuance of daily bread (even though our larder is well stocked), so we make request for a continuance of pardoning mercy. Sin still indwells us and the effects are not done away till we make our exit from this world. Often accusations of conscience for past sins come upon us, so that we are (for our further humbling) made to "possess the iniquities of our youth"

(Job 13:26), and this makes us long for a renewal of this Divine benefit. “Remember, O LORD, Thy tender mercies and Thy lovingkindnesses, for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember me for Thy goodness’ sake, O LORD” (Psa. 25:6, 7). Thus David begged that God’s past mercies might continue with him.

Third, we thereby make humble request for the *assurance and comfort* of our pardon. Strictly speaking, this is an effect or fruit of forgiveness, yet is this specially desired by the penitent believer: that “being justified by faith we may have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ” and “access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:1, 2). This is a manifestation of and realization in our hearts of the pardoning mercy of God: that we may have a comfortable sense of being washed from our sins by the precious blood of the Lamb. It is one thing for God to blot sins out of His book of remembrance, it is another for Him to remove them from our conscience. It is an additional blessing when we are “sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). David prayed for this when he said “Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice . . . Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation” (Psa. 51:8, 12).—A.W.P.

WELCOME TIDINGS.

“Trust ye in the LORD forever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Isa. 26:4). Four things are to be noted in this exhortation: the Object of our trust, the constancy of such trust, the reason therefor, and the blessed effect. The One to whom we must look for the supply of every need is the great Jehovah, the Self-existent and Self-sufficient One. The duration of our trust is to be “forever”: at all times and under all circumstances—in seasons of darkness and distress, of weakness and old age, in hours when all appears to be hopeless. “For in Jehovah is everlasting strength.” We are not asked to put our trust in a feeble and vacillating object who will fail us, but in One who is the Possessor of infinite and eternal might. The effect of such trust, as the previous verse affirms, will be that “perfect peace” is our portion.

Now one of the chief means and aids to trusting in the Lord is for the mind to dwell upon and the heart to be occupied with His omnipotence. “Power belongeth unto God” (Psa. 62:11). Not a single creature in the universe has any power whatever save that which the Almighty imparts to him. But power belongs unto God inherently, and not by delegation or acquirement. It is one of His distinctive excellencies, as much so as His holiness or wisdom. So great is His power that nothing is impossible to Him. His might is displayed throughout the material realm—in the creating and sustaining of the heavenly bodies, the ruling of the seas, the fructifying of the land, and equally so in the devastating tornadoes and earthquakes, which should make us tremble before Him.

But the power of God shines forth most illustriously in the new creation, where He brings a clean thing out of an unclean. Yet this is not so apparent to our senses, and even believers are much slower to perceive it. This is clear from the Apostle’s prayer “That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward” (Eph. 1:19). Very striking indeed is this: when Paul spoke of God’s might and majesty in the old creation, he mentioned “His power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20); but when he refers to His working in grace and salvation, he terms it, “the exceeding greatness of His power.” God proportions His power to the character of the work in hand. For example: the casting out of demons is ascribed to His “finger” (Luke 11:20), His delivering of Israel from Egypt is attributed to His “hand” (Exo. 13:9), but when the Lord saves a sinner it is His “holy *arm*” which is said to give “Him the victory” (Psa. 98:1, 2).

“Trust ye in the LORD forever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.” The heart’s contemplation of the mighty power of God must indeed deepen our confidence in Him. It was the ground of Abraham’s assurance when he said to his servants, “Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *come again* to you” (Gen. 22:5). Though he had received command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, yet he proceeded to the altar “accounting that God *was able* to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19). It was the ground of the three Hebrews’ confidence: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us” (Dan. 3:17). Yea, it was the ground of the Saviour’s confidence, “Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears *unto Him that was able* to save Him from death” (Heb. 5:7). Nothing is so well calculated to dispel our fears and strengthen our hearts as a believing apprehension of God’s strength and sufficiency.

He who brought a nation across the Red Sea without any ships, and sustained them in the wilderness for 40 years, still lives and reigns. Is not that welcome tidings! And do we

not need to remind ourselves of this grand fact again and again in the trying days through which we are passing? It is only by the gracious power of God that this little monthly messenger is still being sent forth. To His praise be it recorded that we have encountered no obstacle from the censor in sending it to foreign lands. To His praise be it recorded that there has been no falling off in funds. To His praise be it recorded that, so far as we are aware, not a single letter intended for us or a single copy of "Studies" mailed out by us has failed to reach its destination safely. Great is the power of our God. Let the following quotations from letters to hand be viewed as further examples of the workings of His mighty power.

"How helpful the 'Studies' have been, especially your very practical messages on the Sermon on the Mount, which I have been teaching to a class of men. The tragedy of it being that this section of God's Word is so neglected, and very rarely preached or taught by Bible teachers in this country. We realize with you the truth contained in your December editorial, and desire more and more that the majority of Christians would put first things first" (Preacher in U.S.A.). "I should like to have been under your personal ministry, because I think you would be able to correct and instruct me. Never, so far as I can recall, had I been taught anything about my daily walk until I met you through your letters and 'Studies' " (U.S.A. and he had a full course in a "Bible Institute")!

"I cannot refrain from expressing my deep regret that there is any thought of your discontinuing the 'Studies.' Where, oh where, are we to receive spiritual ministry? We do not get it from the pulpit any more. Good, sound expository books are fast going out of print. The great bulk of religious papers today have very little real food to offer. I can only plead with you to continue on for the sake of the few who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. To me the 'Studies' is worth more than all the religious magazines I know of put together" (North Dakota). "I find your 'Studies' invaluable. They show the consistency of parts with the whole: you give the entire glory to Him to whom it wholly belongs. You stimulate investigation, and 'give the sense'—Nehemiah 8:8" (Australia).

"The truth contained in 'Studies' is certainly not wanted by the mass of professing Christians today. They may be objected to, but cannot be denied. What I like especially in all your articles is, you put forth nothing but what is proved by Scripture quotations; and I trust you may be enabled to carry on the Lord's work" (Scotland). "Thank you for the 'Studies.' They have been a blessing to me and I hope to others also. It is just what God's children need these days—searching of the heart and conscience—but not very welcome. Lord, help *me* to walk in the Truth before Thee" (Los Angeles). "I want to express my gratitude for the Studies: the warnings, instructions, encouragement, and spiritual uplift that they give" (Preacher in U.S.A.). "I have been much interested and edified by your articles on the 'Lord's Prayer.' A dispensational teaching which narrows our Father's messages to us has done much mischief" (England).

"With grateful thanks I enclose contribution to 'Studies.' They continue to be most searching and helpful" (New Zealand), "We never cease to thank our God for your magazine and ask that it may be His will to spare you both to carry it on faithfully. I am sure there are hundreds who feel as I do, and have been as tardy as I in writing to say so" (Australia). "The magazine is indeed full of good things! How often one is made to sigh! I enjoy them most because they exalt a precious Saviour and put the sinner in his proper place" (Lancaster). "Many times have I lifted up my heart in thanksgiving to our gracious

God for the help received from the Studies. My earnest prayer is that you may continue to be led by the Holy Spirit” (Preacher). “I have been reading the Studies now for 10 years, and I thank the Lord for them. They are solid spiritual food” (Australia).

“I get so much help from your articles, but my heart is grieved because I can find none with whom I can have fellowship in these good things. I would love to talk with someone who believes the truth of Election, but I do not dare to mention it, for professors will not accept God’s Word thereon” (Colorado). “Once again I praise God He has enabled you to carry on with the good work. I can truly say blessing has come to my soul and others. What we most need in these dark days is that which brings us low before God, and your articles have, by God’s grace, produced this very effect” (Preacher). “The Studies on Heart Adultery are most necessary, so plainly exposing sin as they do—which is the work of a true servant of God” (Australia). “Thank you for your magazines which are real Studies indeed. They are a continued help and blessing and many portions of God’s Word have been opened up to me by them” (Wales).

“I have enjoyed reading the ‘Studies’ in these days of so much superficial ministry both by pen and word. I was so glad to read in the December number of the need to return to sound practical teaching and leave the piecing together of present events to fit the prophetic picture alone. There is certainly too much of it at the present time and to my mind only causes a carnal interest and fails to feed faith” (Scotland). “I can say Amen to your timely words on not teaching Prophecy to young people” (English Preacher). “Your writings are in very strong contrast to the bulk of religious magazines of today. Even so-called “Calvinistic” magazines are often full of the writings of men long since dead—good in themselves, but not suitable to form the principle contents of a magazine; or else the articles just skim the surface” (Kent). “Studies mean a great deal to me. There is so much food for thought, as well as that which stirs the heart and causes one to take inventory and to say, ‘search me, O God, and know my heart’ ” (U.S.A.).

“I wish to thank you for the help and encouragement received from ‘Studies,’ I often bemoan the money wasted on worldly lusts, and wish it were in my power to convert it to His cause” (Canada). “I look forward to each issue with much eagerness and it is my earnest prayer that nothing will hinder its continuance” (Washington). “I enjoy your ‘Studies’ next to my Bible. As one gets older he wants something different from information for the mind: he wants something that touches the heart, something to wound and then to heal and I get these in the ‘Studies’ ” (Canada).

Thankful to say all is well with us. To God be all the praise.—A.W. and V.E. Pink.

