

Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 8
August, 1940
THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL.

The Gospel evidences itself to be Divine because it enunciates that which the mind of man could not possibly have originated. The grand truths which it proclaims are without any parallel or rival among all the schemes of human wisdom. Pre-eminently is this the case with the full-orbed Gospel of God. Alas, with scarcely an exception it is at best an attenuated Gospel which is being preached today, preaching that leaves out some of the most striking, unique and blessed features. Let the glorious tidings of redemption be told out in all their simplicity and yet profundity, their Scriptural perspicuity and perspective, and those who truly receive these glad tidings into their hearts unitedly acknowledge that it is neither exaggeration nor extravagance to designate them the Glorious Gospel. Nothing so honours and magnifies God; nothing so rejoices and satisfies believers.

Now here and there throughout the Scriptures the Spirit has graciously furnished us with brief compendiums of evangelical truth, comprising within the scope of a single verse the essential elements of the whole plan and way of salvation. Luther was wont to call these compendiums “miniature Gospels”: such an one we have in “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). This verse sets forth in most decisive language the vicarious sufferings of Christ as the satisfaction offered by Him to Divine justice for the sins of His people; the imputation of His perfect obedience unto believers as their title to eternal life; and the real Deity of Him whose righteousness becomes theirs for justification by virtue of their union with Him. These grand truths could not be expressed more clearly and tersely.

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” This is one of the most profound and most comprehensive statements to be found in all the Scriptures concerning the Atonement. Into it is compressed a whole treatise of theology, and therefore each clause, yea every *word* in it, calls for separate and close consideration. As we examine this most solemn and yet blessed declaration we find there are three things said therein respecting God the Father, three things predicated of God the Son in His mediatorial capacity, and three things concerning His people. So we propose to take up the contents of our passage in this order: may the heart of writer and reader alike be Divinely prepared to ponder the same, for something superior to intellectual acumen is needed when contemplating spiritual things.

The three things here mentioned of God the Father are His high sovereignty, His inflexible justice, and His amazing grace. His sovereignty is affirmed in the words, “He hath made Him to be sin for us,” and therein His supremacy appears at three points. First, in *the Person* He selected for this extraordinary transaction, namely, the Son. None but the Father possessed the right and authority to assign the Son for this awful undertaking: He alone could appoint Him to that work. As the God-man, Christ was the Servant of the Father, and in ordaining Him to the task of making expiation for sin, He demonstrated His high and absolute sovereignty over all persons and creatures. No man, no angel, no cherub or seraph—only the Son Himself, was singled out.

The sovereignty of God the Father appears, second, in the unique *legal arrangement* or constitution here alluded to: that He who was without sin should be dealt with as a sinner, and that those who were sinners should be allowed to go free of suffering their

just deserts. None but He who is absolute sovereign above all can dispense the Law according to His own imperial good pleasure. Third, the sovereignty of the Father appears in *the ones selected* to be the beneficiaries of this unparalleled arrangement. Christ was not made sin for all of Adam's race, for all mankind are not made the righteousness of God in Him. It was the sovereignty of God which *elects* the persons who were to be everlastingly indebted to Christ's atoning work. Thus the whole foundation of this amazing transaction lay in the absolute sovereignty of God the Father over all persons and things, and before that sovereignty we should humbly and thankfully bow.

Next we behold here the inflexible *justice* of the Father. Scripture nowhere affirms that God was under any compulsion or moral necessity of saving His people as He did: it was solely by His mere sovereign good pleasure that He devised the method and means revealed in the Gospel. But having ordained that His Son should be "made under the law," then it *was* imperative that the demands of the law should be fully met. It was to this end that God sent forth His Son to be a propitiation for sin, to "declare His righteousness" (Rom. 3:25). Thus, in a special manner His justice has been magnified by the death of Christ. True, God cannot act contrary to His own perfections, but the *exercise* of His justice, mercy, or any of His attributes, is regulated solely by His will: We must adhere strictly to the exact terms of Holy Writ: it is *not*, "that *can* by no means clear the guilty, but "that *will* by no means clear" them (Exo. 34:7).

The amazing *grace* of the Father manifested itself in the aim or design of this transaction, namely, that His people might be freed from sin and constituted righteous before Him. Note carefully it is not said merely that Christ was "made sin for us," but "*He* made Him to be sin for us." Thus the grace of the Victim is no more conspicuous than that of Him who furnished the altar of redemption with the foreordained Lamb. Though Christ was the Father's well-beloved, the One in whom His soul delighted (Isa. 42:1), nevertheless out of unspeakable love for His people He ordained Him to be made a curse for them. O what stupendous grace that God, knowing our wretched condition, pitied us and resolved to reconcile us to Himself, by such a Priest and Sacrifice as became Him and was suited to us. O what gratitude and praise are due Him from us!—A.W.P.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

14. *Prayer*: Matthew 6:9-13.

It is only two years since we wrote a series of 10 cover-page articles on what is usually designated the Lord's Prayer, and therefore we shall not now enter so fully into detail as we otherwise would have done. Before taking up its several clauses, let us make one or two general observations on the prayer as a whole. First, we would note the words with which Christ prefaced it: "after this manner pray ye." This intimates that the Lord Jesus was supplying a *pattern* after which our prayers are to be modeled. So ignorant are we that, "we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26), and therefore in answer to our oft-repeated request "Lord, teach us to pray," (Luke 11:1), He has graciously furnished the instruction we so sorely need, revealing the manner in which Christians should approach God, the order in which their requests should be presented, the things they most need to ask for, and the adoration which is due the One they are supplicating.

This model prayer is also found, in condensed form, in Luke's Gospel, and there it is introduced by the words, "When ye pray, *say*" (11:2). This makes it clear that this prayer is not only a pattern to be copied, but also a form to be used verbatim, the plural pronouns therein suggesting it is appropriate for collective use when the saints assemble together. The fact that its use as a form has been perverted is no argument why it should never be thus employed. True, we need to be much on our guard against repeating it by rote, coldly and mechanically, and earnestly seek grace to recite it reverently and feelingly—in our judgment, once every public service—and always at family worship. In view of the class to whom we write it is scarcely necessary to add that many have made a superstitious use of this prayer, as though it were a magical charm.

A few of our readers may have been disturbed by the foolish and harmful error that the Lord's Prayer was not designed and is not suited for use in this dispensation: that instead, it is "Jewish" and intended for a godly remnant in some "great tribulation period" yet future. One would think that the very stating of such a fantasy is quite sufficient to expose its absurdity to those with any spiritual intelligence. Neither our Lord nor any of His Apostles gave any warning that this prayer was *not* to be used by Christians, or any intimation that it was designed for a future age. The fact that it is found in Luke's Gospel as well as Matthew's is clear indication it is to be employed by Jewish *and* Gentile saints alike. There is nothing whatever in this prayer which is unsuited to Christians now, yea, everything in it is needed by them. That it is addressed to "our Father" furnishes all the warrant we need for it to be used by all the members of His family. Then let none of God's children allow Satan to rob them of this valuable part of their birthright.

The more this blessed and wondrous prayer be pondered—one which we personally love to think of as "the Family Prayer"—the more will the perfect wisdom of its Author be apparent. Here we are taught both the manner and method of how to pray, and the matter for which to pray. Christ knew both our needs and the Father's good will toward us, and therefore has He graciously supplied us with a simple but sufficient directory. Every aspect of prayer is included therein: adoration in its opening clause, thanksgiving at the close, confession of sin is implied. Its petitions are seven in number, showing the completeness of the outline here furnished us. It is virtually an epitome of the Psalms and a most excellent summary of all prayer. Every clause in it is taken from the Old Testament, denoting that our prayers cannot be acceptable unless they be Scriptural. "If we ask

anything according to His will He heareth us" (1 John 5:14), and God's will can only be learned from His Word.

"Our Father which art in heaven." This opening clause presents to us the Object to whom we pray and the most endearing relation which He sustains to us. By directing us to address the great God as "our Father which art in heaven" we are assured of His love and power: this precious title being designed to raise our affections, excite to reverential fear and confirm our confidence in the efficacy of prayer. It is to a Divine Person, One who has our best interests at heart, we are invited to draw near: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us" (1 John 3:1)! God is our "Father" first by creation: (Mal. 2:10). Second, He is our Father by covenant-relationship, and this by virtue of our federal union with Christ—because God is His Father, He is ours: John 20:17. Third, He is our Father by regeneration: when born again we are "made partakers of the Divine nature": Galatians 4:6; 2 Peter 1:4. O for faith to extract the sweetness of this relationship!

It is blessed to see how the Old Testament saints, at a time of peculiar trouble and distress, boldly pleaded this relationship to God. They declared, "Thou didst terrible things . . . behold Thou art wroth." They owned, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." They acknowledged, "Thou hast hid Thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities." And then they pleaded, "But now, O LORD, Thou art *our Father*" (Isa. 64:3-8). Though we have conducted ourselves very undutifully and ungratefully toward You, yet we are Your dear children: though You have chastened us sorely, nevertheless, You are still our Father. To You, therefore, we now in penitence turn, to You we would apply ourselves in prayer, for to whom should we look for succor and relief but from our Father! That was the language of faith.

"Our Father." This teaches us to recognize the Christian brotherhood, to pray for the whole family and not for ourselves only. We must express our love for the brethren by praying for them: we are to be as much concerned about their needs as we are over our own. "Which art in Heaven." Here we are reminded of God's greatness, of His infinite elevation above us. If the words "Our Father" inspire confidence and love, "which art in Heaven" should fill us with humility and awe. It is true that God is everywhere, but He is present in Heaven in a special sense. It is there that He has "prepared His throne": not only His throne of government, by which His kingdom rules over all, but also His throne of grace to which we must by faith draw near. We are to eye Him as God in Heaven, in contrast from the false gods which dwell in temples made by hands.

These words "which art in Heaven," should serve as a guide to direct us in our praying. Heaven is a high and exalted place, and we should address ourselves to God as One who is infinitely above us. It is the place of prospect, and we must picture His holy eye upon us. It is a place of ineffable purity, and nothing which defiles or makes a lie can enter there. It is the "firmament of His power," and we must depend upon Him as the One to whom all might belongs. When the Lord Jesus prayed, He "lifted up His eyes to Heaven," directing us where to obtain the blessings we need. If God is in Heaven, then prayer needs to be a thing of the heart and not of the lips, for no physical voice on earth can rend the skies, but sighs and groans will reach the ear of God. If we are to pray to God in Heaven, then our souls must be detached from all of earth. If we pray to God in Heaven, then faith must wing our petitions. Since we pray to God in Heaven our desires and aspirations must be heavenly.

“Hallowed be Thy name.” Thus begins the petitionary part of this blessed prayer. The requests are seven in number, being divided into a three and a four: the first three concerning God, and last four (ever the number of the creature), our own selves—similarly are the Ten Commandments divided: the first five treating of our duty Godward (in the fifth the parent stands to the child in the place of God) the last five our duty manwards. How clearly, then, is the fundamental duty in prayer here set forth: self and all its needs must be given a secondary place and the Lord freely accorded the pre-eminence in our thoughts, desires and supplications. This petition must take the precedence, for the glory of God’s great name is the ultimate end of all things: every other request must not only be subordinated to this one, but be in harmony with and in pursuance of it. We cannot pray aright unless the honour of God be dominant in our hearts. If we cherish a desire for the honouring of God’s name we must not ask for anything which would be against the Divine holiness to bestow.

By “Thy name” is meant God Himself, as in Psalm 20:1, etc. But more particularly His “name” signifies God as He is revealed. It has pleased the Maker of Heaven and earth to make Himself known to us, not only in His works, but in the Scriptures, and supremely so in Christ. In the written and in the personal Word, God has displayed Himself to us, manifesting His glorious perfections: His matchless attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence; His moral character of holiness, righteousness, goodness and mercy. He is also revealed through His blessed titles: the Rock of Israel, Him that cannot lie, the Father of mercies, the God of all grace. And when we pray that the name of God may be hallowed we make request that the glory thereof may be displayed by Him, and that we may be enabled to esteem and magnify Him agreeably thereto.

In praying that God’s name be hallowed we ask that He will so act that His creatures may be moved to render that adoration which is due Him. His name has indeed been eminently glorified in all ages, in the various workings of His providence and grace, whereby His power, wisdom, righteousness and mercy have been demonstrated before the eyes of angels and of men. We therefore request that He would continue to glorify these perfections. In the past God has, in the magnifying of His name, employed methods and measures which were strange and staggering to finite intelligence: often allowing His enemies to prosper for a time and His people to be sorely persecuted—nevertheless, they glorified “The LORD in the fires” (Isa. 24:15). And so now, and in the future, when we ask for God to be glorified in the prosperity of His Church, the dissemination of the Gospel and the extension of His kingdom, we must subordinate our request to the Divine sovereignty and leave it with Him as to where and when and how these things shall be brought to pass.

“Hallowed be Thy name”: how easy it is to utter these words without the slightest thought of their profound and holy import! If we offer this petition from the heart, we desire that God’s name may be sanctified by us, and at the same time own the indisposition and utter inability to do this of ourselves. Such a request denotes a longing to be empowered to glorify God in everything whereby He makes Himself known, that we may honour Him in all situations and circumstances. Whatever be my lot, however low I may sink, through whatever deep waters I may be called to pass, get to Yourself glory in me and by me. Blessedly was this exemplified by our perfect Saviour. “Now is My soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father save Me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto

unto this hour—Father, glorify Thy name” (John 12:27, 28): though He must be immersed in the baptism of suffering, yet “Hallowed be Thy name.”

“Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.” The first petition has respect to God’s honour, the second and third indicate *the means* whereby His glory is manifested and maintained on earth. God’s name is manifestatively glorified here just in proportion as His “kingdom” comes to us and His “will” is done by us. This is why we are exhorted to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). In praying, “Thy kingdom come,” we acknowledge that by nature we are under the dominion of sin and Satan, and beg that we may be the more fully delivered therefrom and that the rule of God may be more completely established in our hearts. We long to see the kingdom of Grace extended and the kingdom of Glory ushered in. Accordingly we make request that God’s will may be more fully made known to us, wrought in us and performed by us: “in earth as it is in Heaven”: that is, humbly, cheerfully, impartially, promptly, constantly.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” This is the first of the four petitions more immediately relating to the supply of our own needs, in which we can clearly discern an implied reference to each of the Persons in the blessed Trinity. Our temporal wants are supplied by the kindness of the Father; our sins are forgiven through the mediation of the Son; we are preserved from temptation and delivered from evil by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. By asking for our “daily bread” a tacit acknowledgment is made that “in Adam and by our own sins we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; and, that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, nor we to merit, or by our own industry to procure them, but prone to desire, get and use them unlawfully; we pray for ourselves and others that they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day, in the use of lawful means, may of His free gift and as His Fatherly wisdom shall deem best, enjoy a competent portion of them, and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them and contentment in them” (Larger Catechism).

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” As it is contrary to the holiness of God, sin is a defilement, a dishonour, and reproach to us; as it is a violation of His Law, it is a crime. As to the guilt which we contract thereby, it is a *debt*. As creatures we owed a debt of obedience unto our Maker and Governor, and through failure to render the same and on account of our rank disobedience, we have incurred a debt of punishment, and it is for this latter that we implore the Divine pardon. In order to the obtaining of God’s forgiveness, we are required to address ourselves unto Him in faith and prayer. The designed connection between this and the preceding petition should not be missed: “Give us . . . and forgive us”: the former cannot profit us without the latter—what true comfort can we derive from external mercies when our conscience remains burdened on account of a sense of guilt! But since Christ here teaches us that He is a *giving* God, what encouragement to look unto Him as a *forgiving* God.

“And lead us not into temptation.” The “us” includes all fellow Christians on earth, for one of the first things which grace teaches us is unselfishness; to be as much concerned about the good of my brethren as I am about my own—not only for their temporal welfare, but especially for their spiritual. In the preceding petition we have prayed that the guilt of past sins may be remitted, here we beg to be saved from incurring new guilt

through being overcome by fresh sin. This request makes acknowledgment of the universal providence of God, that all creatures are at the sovereign disposal of their Maker, that He has the same absolute control over evil as over good, and therefore has the ordering of all temptations. It is from the evil of temptations we ask to be spared: if God sees fit that we should be tempted objectively (through providences which though good in themselves, offer occasion to sin within us) that we may not yield thereto, or if we yield, that we may not be absolutely overcome.

“But deliver us from evil.” All temptations (trials and troubles) are not evil either in their nature, design, or outcome. The Saviour Himself was tempted of the Devil and was definitely led into the wilderness by the Spirit for that very end. It is therefore from the evil of temptations we are to ask for deliverance, as this final petition indicates. We are to pray not for a total exemption from them, but only for a removal of the *judgment* of them. This is clear from our Lord’s own example in prayer: “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the Evil One” (John 17:15). To be kept from the evil of sin is a far greater mercy than deliverance from the trouble of temptation. But how far has God undertaken to deliver us from evil? First, as it would be hurtful to our highest interests: it was for Peter’s ultimate good that he was suffered to temporarily fall. Second, from its having full dominion over us, so that we shall not totally and finally apostatize. Third, by an ultimate deliverance when He removes us to Heaven.

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” Thus the Family Prayer closes with a doxology or an ascription of that glory which is due unto God, thereby teaching us that prayer and praise should always go together. It is to be carefully noted that this doxology of the Divine perfections is made use of as a plea to enforce the preceding petitions: “deliver us from evil for Thine is the kingdom,” etc.—teaching us to back up our requests with Scriptural reasons or arguments. From the Divine perfections the suppliant is to take encouragement to expect a gracious answer. There is nothing in or from ourselves which is meritorious, and therefore hope must be grounded upon the character of Him to whom we pray. His perfections are not evanescent, but “forever.” The concluding “Amen” expresses both a fervent desire “so be it” and an avowal of faith “it shall be so.”—A. W. P.

THE LIFE OF ELIJAH.

8. At Zarephath.

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:8, 9). Notice carefully the connection between these two verses. The spiritual significance of this may be the more apparent to the reader if we state it thus: our actions must be regulated by the Word of God if our souls are to be nourished and strengthened. That was one of the outstanding lessons taught Israel in the wilderness: their food and refreshment could only be obtained so long as they traveled in the path of obedience (Num. 9:18-23—observe well the sevenfold “at the commandment of the LORD” in that passage). God’s people of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own: the Lord arranged everything for them—when they should journey and when they should encamp. Had they refused to follow the Cloud, there had been no manna for them.

Thus it was with Elijah, for God has given the same rule unto His ministers as they unto whom they minister: they must practice what they preach, or woe be unto them. The Prophet was not allowed to have any will of his own, and to say how long he should remain at Cherith or where he should go from there. The Word of Jehovah settled everything for him, and by *obeying* the same he obtained *sustenance*. What searching and important truth is there here for every Christian: the path of obedience is the only one of blessing and enrichment. Ah, may we not discover at this very point the cause of our leanness and the explanation of our unfruitfulness? Is it not because we have been so self-willed that our soul is starved and our faith weak? Is it not because there has been so little denying of self, taking up the cross and following Christ, that we are so sickly and joyless?

Nothing so ministers to the health and joy of our souls as being in subjection to the will of Him with whom we have to do. And the preacher must heed this principle, as well as the ordinary Christian. The preacher must himself tread the path of obedience if he would be used by the Holy One. How could Elijah have afterwards said with so much assurance on mount Carmel, “If the Lord be God, follow Him,” if he had previously followed a course of self-pleasing and insubordination? As we pointed out last month, the correlative of “service” is obedience. The two things are permanently joined together: as soon as I cease to obey my Master, I am no longer His “servant.” In this connection let us not forget that one of the noblest titles of our King was “*The Servant of Jehovah*.” None of us can seek to realize a grander aim than that which was the inspiration of His heart: “I come to do Thy will, O My God.”

But let it be frankly pointed out that the path of obedience to God is far from being an easy one: it calls for the daily denying of self and therefore it can only be traversed as the eye is fixed steadily on the Lord and the conscience is in subjection to His Word. It is true that in keeping His commandments there is “great reward” (Psa. 19:11), for the Lord will be no man’s debtor; nevertheless it calls for the setting aside of carnal reason, and that is no easy matter to flesh and blood. Witness the path of Elijah: called to take his place by Cherith and there be fed by ravens—how could a proud intellect understand that? And now bidden to journey to a far distant and heathen city, there to be sustained by a desolate widow, that was herself on the point of starvation. Ah, my reader, the path of faith is utterly opposed to what we call “common sense,” and if you suffer from the same

spiritual disease as does this writer, then you often find it harder to crucify reason than you do to repudiate the filthy rags of self-righteousness.

“So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks” (1 Kings 17:10). So poor that she was without any fuel, or any servant to go and obtain a few sticks for her. What encouragement could Elijah derive from appearances? None whatever: instead there was everything which was calculated to fill him with doubts and fears if he were occupied with outward circumstances. “And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (vv. 10-12): *that* was what confronted the Prophet when he arrived at his Divinely appointed destination! Put yourself in his place, dear reader, and would you not have felt that such a prospect was a gloomy and disquieting one?

But Elijah “conferred not with flesh and blood,” and therefore he was not discouraged by what looked so unpromising a situation. Instead, his heart was sustained by the immutable Word of Him that cannot lie. Elijah’s confidence rested not in favourable circumstances or “a goodly outlook,” but in the faithfulness of the living God; and therefore his faith needed no assistance from the things around him. Appearances might be dark and dismal, but the eye of faith could pierce the black clouds and see above them the smiling countenance of his Provider. Elijah’s God was the Almighty, with whom all things are possible. “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee”: *that* was what his heart was resting on. What is yours resting on? Are you being kept in peace in this ever-changing scene? Have you made one of His sure promises your own? “Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou *shalt* be fed” (Psa. 37:3). “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed” (Psa. 46:1, 2).

But let us return to the outward circumstances which confronted Elijah upon his approach to Zarephath. “When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks.” God had told His servant to go there and had promised a widow should sustain him, but what her name was, where she lived, and how he was to distinguish her from others, he was not informed. He trusted God to give him further light when he arrived there—nor was he disappointed. He was speedily relieved of any suspense as to the identity of the person who was to befriend him. Apparently this meeting was quite casual, for there was no appointment between them. “Behold”—ponder and admire—“the widow woman *was there*”: see how the Lord in His providence overrules all events, so that this particular woman should be at the gate at the very time the Prophet arrived!

Behold! here she comes forth as if on purpose to meet him: yet he did not know her, nor she know him. It has all the appearance of being accidental, and yet it was *decreed* and arranged by God so as to make good His word to the Prophet. Ah, my reader, there is no event in this world, however great or however small, which happens by chance. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). How blessed to be assured that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psa. 37:23). It is sheer unbelief which disconnects the ordinary

things of life from God. All our circumstances and experiences are directed by the Lord, for, “of Him and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36). Cultivate the holy habit of seeing the hand of God in everything that happens to us.

“When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there.” How this illustrates once more a principle to which we have frequently called the attention of the reader, namely, that when God works He always works at *both* ends of the line. If Jacob sends his sons down into Egypt seeking food in time of famine, Joseph is moved to give it unto them. If Israel’s spies enter Jericho, there is a Rahab raised up to shelter them. If Mordecai is begging the Lord to come to the deliverance of His threatened people, king Ahasuerus is rendered sleepless, made to search the State records and befriend Mordecai and his fellows. If the Ethiopian eunuch is desirous of an understanding of God’s Word, Philip is sent to expound it to him. If Cornelius is praying for an opening up of the Gospel, Peter is charged to preach it to him. Elijah had received no intimation as to where this widow resided, but Divine providence timed her steps so that she encountered him at the entrance to the city. What encouragements to faith are these!

Here, then, was the widow: but how was Elijah to know she was the one whom God had ordained should befriend him? Well he must try her, as the servant of Abraham did Rebekah when he was sent to fetch a wife for Isaac. Eliezer prayed that the damsel to whom he should say, “let down thy pitcher” would answer, “drink, and I will give thy camels drink also” (Gen. 24:14). Rebekah came forth and fulfilled these conditions. So here: Elijah tests this woman to see if she is kind and benevolent: “Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” Just as Eliezer considered only one possessed of kindness would be a fit companion for his master’s son, so Elijah was convinced that only a liberal-minded person would be likely to sustain him in a time of famine and drought.

“He called to her and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” Observe the gracious and respectful demeanour of Elijah. The fact that he was a Prophet of Jehovah did not warrant him to treat this poor widow in a haughty and overbearing manner. Instead of commanding, he said, “I pray thee.” What a rebuke does that contain for those who are proud and officious. Civility is due to everyone: “be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8) is one of the Divine precepts given to believers. And what a severe test it was to which Elijah submitted this poor woman: to fetch him a drink of water! Yet she made no demur nor did she demand a high price for what had become a costly luxury; no, not even though Elijah was a complete stranger to her, belonging to another race. Admire here the moving power of God, who can draw out the human heart to acts of kindness unto His servants.

“And as she was going to fetch it.” Yes, she left off gathering sticks for herself, and at the first request of this stranger started for the drink of water. Let us learn to imitate her in this respect, and be always ready to perform an act of kindness toward our fellow creatures. If we do not have the wherewithal to give to the distressed, we should be the more ready to work for them (Eph. 4:28). A cup of cold water, though it cost us nothing more than the trouble of fetching it, shall in no-wise lose its reward. “And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand” (1 Kings 17:11). This the Prophet requested in order to test her still further—and what a

test: to share her very last meal with him—and also to pave the way for a further discourse with her.

“Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.” What a selfish request this seemed! How likely would human nature resent such a demand to draw upon her slender resources. Yet in reality it was God that was meeting with her in the hour of her deepest need. “Therefore will the LORD wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted that He may have mercy upon you, for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him” (Isa. 30:18). But this widow must first be proved, as later another Gentile woman was proved by the Lord incarnate (Matt. 15:22-28). God would indeed supply all her need, but would she trust Him? So often He allows things to get worse before there is any improvement. He “waits to be gracious.” Why? To bring us to the end of ourselves and of our resources, till all seems lost and we are in despair: that we may more clearly discern *His delivering hand*.

“And she said, as the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal, in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1 Kings 17:12). The effects of the terrible famine and drought in Palestine were also felt in the adjacent countries. In connection with “oil” being found in this widow’s possession at Zarephath in Zidon, J. J. Blunt, in his admirable work, “Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament,” has a helpful chapter. He points out that on the division of Canaan the district of *Zidon* fell to the lot of Asher (Josh. 19:28). Then he turns the reader back to Deuteronomy 33 reminding him that when Moses blessed the 12 tribes he said, “Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil” (v. 24)—indicating the fertility of that district and the character of its principal product. Thus, after a long spell of famine, oil was most likely to be found there. Hence by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see their perfect harmony.

“Behold I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and *die*.” Poor soul: reduced to the last extremity, with nothing but a most painful death staring her in the face! Hers was the language of carnal reason and not of faith, of unbelief and not of confidence in the living God; yes, and quite natural under the circumstances. As yet she knew nothing of that word to Elijah, “Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:9). No, she thought the end had come. Ah, my reader, how much better is God than our fears. The unbelieving Hebrews imagined they would starve in the wilderness, but they did not. David once said in his heart, “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” (1 Sam. 27:1), but he did not. The Apostles thought they would drown in the stormy sea, but they did not.

“Were half the breath in sorrow spent
To Heaven in supplication sent,
Our cheerful song would oftener be
‘Hear what the Lord hath done for me.’”

“And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1 Kings 17:12). To natural sight, to human reason, it seemed impossible that she could sustain anyone. In abject poverty, the end of her provisions was now in sight. And her eyes were not on God (any more than ours are till the Spirit works within us!) but upon the barrel, and *it* was now

failing her; consequently there was nothing before her mind except *death*. Unbelief and death are inseparably joined together. This widow's confidence lay in the barrel and the cruse, and beyond them she saw no hope. As yet her soul knew nothing of the blessedness of communion with Him to whom alone belong the issues from death (Psa. 68:20). She was not yet able to "against hope believe in hope" (Rom. 4:18). Alas, what a poor tottering thing is that hope which rests on nothing better than a barrel of meal.

How prone we all are to lean on something just as paltry as a barrel of meal, and just so long as we do our expectations can only be scanty and evanescent. Yet, on the other hand, let us remember that the smallest measure of meal in the hand of God is to faith as sufficient and effectual as "the cattle upon a thousand hills." But alas, how rarely is faith in healthy exercise. Only too often we are like the disciples when, in the presence of the hungry multitude they exclaimed, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are *they* among so many?" (John 6:9)—that is the language of unbelief, of carnal reason. Faith is not occupied with difficulties, but with Him with whom all things are possible. Faith is not occupied with circumstances, but with the God of circumstances. Thus it was with Elijah, as we shall see (D.V.) when we contemplate the immediate sequel.

And what a test of Elijah's faith was now supplied by those doleful words of the poor widow. Consider the situation which now confronted his eyes. A widow and her son starving: a few sticks, a handful of meal, and a little oil between them and death. Nevertheless God had said to him, "I have commanded a widow woman there *to sustain thee*." How many would exclaim, How deeply mysterious, what a trying experience for the Prophet!—why, he needed to help *her* rather than become a burden upon her. Ah, but like Abram before him, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith." He knew that the Possessor of Heaven and earth had decreed she *should* sustain him, and even though there had been no meal or oil at all, that had in nowise dampened his spirits or deterred him. O my reader, if you know anything experimentally of the goodness, the power and faithfulness of God, let your confidence in Him remain unshaken, no matter what appearances may be.

"He who hath helped thee hitherto,
Will help thee all thy journey through;
And give thee daily cause to raise
New Ebenezers to His praise."

"Behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Let it be duly noted that this woman did not fail to discharge her responsibility. Up to the very end she was industrious, making use of the means to hand. Instead of giving way to utter despair, sitting down and wringing her hands, she was busily occupied, gathering sticks for what she fully believed would be her last meal. This is not an unimportant detail, but one which we need to take to heart. *Idleness* is never justified, least of all in an emergency: nay, the more desperate the situation the greater the need for us to bestir ourselves. To give way to dejection never accomplishes any good. Discharge your responsibility to the very end, even though it be in preparing for your final meal. Richly was the widow repaid for her industry. It was while she was *in the path of duty* (household duty!), that God, through His servant, met with and blessed her!—A.W.P.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

3. *Its Nature.*

We now come to our fourth point: The spiritual inability of the natural man is a *criminal* one. This follows inevitably from the fact that his impotency is a moral and voluntary one. Highly important it is that we should be brought to see, feel, and own that our spiritual helplessness is a culpable one, for until we do so we shall never truly justify God nor condemn ourselves. To realize one's self to be equally "without strength" and "without excuse" is deeply humiliating, and fallen man will strive with all his might to stifle such a conviction and deny the truth of it. Yet until we place the blame of our sinfulness where it really belongs, we shall not, we cannot, either vindicate the righteousness of the Divine Law or appreciate the marvelous grace made known in the Gospel. To condemn ourselves as God condemns us is the one prerequisite to establish our title to salvation in Christ.

"We cannot ascribe too much to the grace of God; but we should be careful that, under a semblance of exalting His grace, we do not furnish the slothful and unfaithful with excuses for their willfulness and wickedness. God is gracious; but let men be justly responsible for his own evil and not presume to state his case so as would, by just consequence, represent the holy God as being the cause of the sin which He hates and forbids" wrote that prince in Israel, John Newton. That was indeed a timely word. Alas that some who claim to be great admirers of his works have sadly failed to uphold the responsibility of the sinner, and have so expressed his spiritual inability as to furnish him with much excuse for his sloth and infidelity. Only by insisting on the criminality of fallen man's impotency can such a deplorable snare be avoided.

Inexorably as man's criminality attaches to his free agency in the committing of sin, yet as said above, the sinner will strive with might and main to avoid such a conclusion and seek to throw the blame upon someone else other than himself. He will haughtily ask, Would any right-minded person blame a man whose arms had been broken because he could no longer perform manual labour? or condemn a blind man because he did not read? then why should I be held guilty for not performing spiritual duties which are altogether beyond my powers? To this difficulty several replies may be made. (1) There is no analogy in the cases you have advanced. Broken arms and sightless eyes are incompetent members, but the intellectual and moral faculties have not been destroyed, and it is because of your misuse of the same that you are justly held culpable.

(2) Not only do you fail to use your moral faculties in the performing of spiritual good, but you employ them in the doing of moral evil, and the excuse that you cannot help yourself is an idle one. Apply that principle to the commercial transactions of society, and what would be the result? A man contracts a debt within the compass of his present financial ability to meet. He then perversely and wickedly squanders his money, and gambles away his property so that he is no longer able to pay what he owes: is he *therefore* not bound to pay? Has his reckless prodigality freed him from all moral obligation to discharge his debts? Must justice now break her scales and no more hold an equal balance because he chooses to be a villain? No indeed: unregenerate men would not allow such reasoning.

To this it may be objected, I did not bring this depravity upon myself, but was born with it. If my heart be altogether evil and I did not make it so, if such a heart was given me without my choice and consent, then how can I be to blame for its inevitable issues

and actions? Such a question betrays the fact that a wicked heart is regarded as a calamity which man did not choose, but which must be endured. It is contemplated as a thing not at all faulty *in its own nature*, so that if there be any blame attached to it, it must be for something previous to it and of quite another kind: as a man born diseased is not personally to blame, but if it be the result of his own follies it is a just retribution. But to reason so about sin is utterly erroneous: as if it were no sin merely to be a sinner or to commit sin when one has an inclination so to do, but that only the bringing of a sinful disposition upon ourselves would be a wicked thing.

Stripped of all disguise and ambiguity, the above objection amounts to this: Adam was in reality the only sinner, and we his miserable offspring being by nature depraved, are under a necessity of sinning, and therefore cannot be to blame for it. The fact that sin itself is sinful is lost sight of. Scripture traces all our evil acts back to a sinful heart, and teaches that this is a blamable thing in itself. A depraved heart is a moral thing, being something quite different from a weak head, a bad memory, or an infirm constitution. A man is not to blame for these physical infirmities, providing he has not brought them upon himself. To say that I cannot help hating God and opposing my neighbour, and that therefore I am not to blame for the same, certainly makes me out to be a most vile and insensible wretch.

It is not necessary in order to a fallen creature's being to blame for his evil dispositions, that he should first be virtuous or free from moral corruption. If a person now finds himself a sinner, and that from the heart he approves and chooses rebellion against God and His Law, he is not the less a sinner because he has been of the same disposition for many years and has always sinned from his birth. His having sinned from the beginning, and done nothing else cannot be a legitimate excuse for sinning now. Nor is man's guilt the less because sin is so deeply and so thoroughly fixed in his heart: the stronger the enmity against God, the greater its heinousness. Disinclination Godwards is the very essence of depravity. When we rightly define the *nature* of man's inability unto good—namely, a moral and a voluntary one: not the absence of faculties, but the misuse of them—then this excuse of blamelessness is at once exposed.

But the carnal mind will still object—"We are naturally as God has made us. And if therefore we are born sinful and God has created us thus, then He and not ourselves is the Author of sin." To such awful lengths is the enmity of the carnal mind capable of going: shifting the onus from his own guilty shoulders and throwing the blame upon the thrice holy God! But this objection was obviated in an earlier article. God made man upright, but he apostatized. Man ruined himself. God endowed each of us with rationality, with a conscience, with a will to refuse the evil and choose the good; and it is by the free exercise of our faculties that we sin, and we have no more justification for transferring the guilt from ourselves to someone else than Adam had to blame Eve or Eve the Serpent.

It is replied, But it is not consistent with the Divine perfections to bring mankind into the world under such handicapped and wretched circumstances. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). It is blasphemous to say that it is not consistent with the Divine perfections for God to do what in fact He *does*. It is a matter of fact that we are born into the world destitute of the moral image of God, ignorant of Him, insensible of His infinite glory. It is a plain matter of fact that in consequence of this deprivation we are disposed to love ourselves supremely, live to ourselves ultimately, and wholly de-

light in what is not of God. And it is plain to demonstration that this tendency is in direct contrariety to God's Holy Law and is exceedingly sinful. Whether or not we can see the justice and wisdom of this Divine providence, yet we must remember that God is "holy in all His ways, and righteous in all His works."

It may still be objected, How can I possibly be to blame for my evil disposition when it was Adam who corrupted human nature? Answer: You are an enemy to the infinitely glorious God, and that *voluntarily*, and therefore you are infinitely to blame and without excuse, for nothing can make it right for a creature to be deliberately hostile to his Creator or possibly extenuate such a crime. It is in its own nature infinitely wrong, and therefore you stand guilty before God. The very fact that in the Day of judgment "every mouth will be stopped" (Rom. 3:19) shows there is no validity or force to this objection. It is for *the acting out of* his nature—instead of the mortifying thereof—for which the sinner is held accountable. The fact that we are born traitors to God cannot cancel our obligation to render Him allegiance: no man can escape from the righteous requirements of law by a voluntary opposition to it.

That man's sinful nature is the direct consequence of Adam's transgression does not to the slightest degree make it any less his own sin, or render him any less blameworthy. This is clear not only from the justice of the principle of representation (Adam's acting as our federal head), but also from the fact that each of us approves of Adam's transgression by emulating his example, joining ourselves with him in rebellion against God. That we go on to break the Covenant of Works and disobey the Divine Law demonstrates that we are righteously condemned with Adam. Because each descendant of Adam voluntarily prolongs and perpetuates in himself the evil inclination originated by his first parents, renders us *doubly* guilty. If not, why do we not repudiate Adam and refuse to sin—stand out in opposition to him, and be holy! If we resent our being corrupted through Adam, why not break the entail of sin?

But let us now turn from these objections to the positive side of our subject. The Scriptures uniformly teach that fallen man's moral and voluntary inability is a *criminal* one, that God justly holds him guilty both for his depraved state and all his sinful actions. So plain is this, so abundantly evidenced, there is little need for us to labour the point. The first three chapters of Romans are expressly devoted to this solemn theme. There it is declared, "The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (1:18). The reason for this is given in verses 19, 20, ending with the inexorable sentence, "So that they are without excuse." The second chapter opens with, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man," and in 3:19 the Apostle shows the ruling of the Divine Law is such that, in the Day to come, "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

The criminality of the sinner's depravity and moral impotency is clearly brought out in Matthew 25:14-30. The general design of that parable is easily perceived. By the "Lord" of the servants is signified the Creator as the Owner and Governor of this world. By the "servants" mankind in general is represented. By the different "talents" is meant the faculties and powers with which God has endowed us, the privileges and advantages by which He distinguishes one person from another. By the two servants who faithfully improved their talents, is meant the righteous who serve God with fidelity. By the slothful and unfaithful servant, the sinner, who entirely neglects the service of God and blames Him rather than himself for his negligence. His complaint in verses 24 and 25 expresses

the feelings of every impenitent sinner, complaining that God *requires* from him (holiness) and what He has not given to him (a holy heart). God's condemnation is on the ground that he improves not what he *did* have (v. 27)—his rational faculties and moral powers. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness" (v. 30) shows the justice of his condemnation.

The excuse that I cannot help being so perverse is further ruled out of court by Christ's declarations to the scribes and Pharisees. They had no heart either for Christ or His doctrine: He told them plainly, "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word" (John 8:43). But their inability was no excuse for them in His account, for He affirmed that all their impotency arose from their evil hearts, their lack of a holy disposition: "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will (desire to) do" (v. 44). Yet though they had no more power to help themselves than we have, and were no more able to transform their hearts than we are, nevertheless our Lord judged them to be wholly to blame and altogether inexcusable, saying to them, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak (*excuse*) for their sin" (John 15:22).

Let it be specifically pointed out that when Scripture affirms the inability of a man unto good, it never does so by way of extenuation. Thus, when Jehovah asked Israel of old, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23) It was not for the purpose of mitigating their guilt, but with the object of showing how it aggravated their obstinacy of heart and to evince that no external means could be effectual unto their recovery. Just as likely was an Ethiopian to be moved by exhortation or expostulation to seek and change the colour of his skin, as any appeals would induce rebels against God to renounce those iniquities to which they had so long been addicted.

"Because I tell you the truth, ye believe Me not. Which of you convinceth Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me? He that is of God heareth God's word: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:45-47). Those cutting interrogations of our Lord proceeded on the supposition that they could have received the teaching of Christ if it had been agreeable to their corrupt nature, and its being otherwise was the only reason why they could not understand or receive it. In like manner, when He affirmed, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him," Christ did not intimate that any natural man honestly desired to come unto Him, and was deterred from so doing *against* his will—He meant that man is *incapable* of freely doing that which is inconsistent with his corruptions. They were averse to come unto the holy Redeemer because they were in love with sin.

The excuse that I cannot help doing wrong is worthless. To plead my inability unto good simply because I lack the heart so to do would be laughed out of court even among men. Does anyone suppose that only the want of a will to earn his living excuses a man from doing so, just as bodily infirmity does? Does anyone imagine that the covetous miser, who with all his useless hoards, has no heart to give a penny to the poor, is for that reason excused from deeds of charity as one who has nothing to give? Nor does a man's heart being fully set in him to evil render his wicked actions the less evil. If they did, then it would necessarily follow that the worse any sinner grows the less to blame is he—and nothing could be more absurd.

Let us show yet further the utter worthlessness of those evasions by which the sinner seeks to deny the criminality of his moral impotency. Men never resort to such silly reasonings when they are wronged by others. When treated with disrespect and ill-nature by their fellows, they never offer the excuses for *them* behind which they seek to cloak their own sins. If someone deliberately robbed me, would I say, Poor fellow, he could not help himself: Adam is to blame! If someone wickedly slandered me, would I say, Such a person is to be pitied, for he was born into the world with this evil disposition. If someone whom I had always treated honourably and generously returned my kindness by doing all he could to injure me, and then replied, I could not help hating you—so far from accepting that as a valid extenuation, I would rightly consider his vile enmity only rendered him the more to blame.

Finally, let it be pointed out that when a sinner is truly awakened, humbled, and broken down before God, he realizes that he *deserves* to be damned for his vile rebellion against God, and freely acknowledges that he is what he is voluntarily and not by compulsion. He now realizes that he has had no love for God, nor any desire to love Him: that he was an enemy to Him in his very heart, and voluntarily so. By His grace he comes to realize that all his fair pretenses and promises, prayers, and religious performances, were mere hypocrisy, arising only from self-love, guilty fears, and mercenary hopes. He feels himself to be *without excuse* and owns that eternal judgment is his just due. When truly convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit the sinner is driven out of all his false refuges, and admits that his inability is a criminal one, that he is guilty.—A.W.P.

ACCESS TO GOD.

The matter of our approach into the presence of God is one of vital importance, yet it is one (like so many others these days) upon which much confusion and misconception exists. We will not now attempt to canvass the principal errors pertaining thereto, for there would be little profit for either writer or reader in prosecuting such a task. Rather do we wish to call attention unto *the various aspects* of the subject, for it is failure to perceive these and hold their due balance which has resulted in the fostering of false impressions in quarters which some regard as being the most orthodox sections of Christendom. If one essential aspect of this subject be ignored, or if another one be emphasized to the virtual exclusion of everything else, then the most misleading and dangerous ideas must result therefrom.

Let us begin by asking the question, Is it possible for a depraved and defiled creature to obtain access unto the thrice Holy One? If there is one thing taught more plainly in the Scriptures than another it is that sin separates the sinner and God. This fearful fact is impressively set forth in Genesis 3:24: that flaming sword was the symbol of a sin-hating God, barring approach unto the emblem of His presence. When Jehovah appeared on Sinai, amid the most solemn manifestations of His awful presence, even the favoured Hebrews were commanded under pain of death to keep their distance from Him. An Israelite who became ceremonially unclean was rigidly excluded from the Camp. Even when the tabernacle and the temple were erected, the common people were not allowed to enter the holy places. In how many different ways did God make it evident that sin obstructed any access to Himself!

But not only does God debar the sinner from access, the sinner himself has no desire to approach unto Him—rather does he wish to flee as far as possible from His presence. A sense of sin and the guilt of it upon the conscience drives the sinner from the Lord. This fact was also solemnly exemplified at the dawn of human history—just as long as our first parents remained in dutiful subjection to their Maker, walking in obedience to His commandments, they enjoyed blissful communion with Him; but as soon as they became self-willed and rebellious, all was radically altered. After they had eaten of the forbidden fruit and they heard the voice of the Lord God in the Garden, they fled in terror, seeking to hide from Him. And thus it has been ever since.

Is there, then, no access to God for the fallen creature? If there were not we should not be engaged in writing this article. Access to God is possible—possible for the chief of sinners—but only via the appointed Mediator. As the Lord Jesus so emphatically declared, “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). It is through the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him alone—not through priest or pope, Mary or the angels, good works or tears—that we may obtain access to God. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access” (Rom. 5:1, 2). In pointing this out we are covering ground which is thoroughly familiar to all our readers, truth which is still proclaimed in many places. Yet it is by no means the whole of the truth on this subject, though it is all that is presented thereon in certain quarters. It is those neglected aspects which we now desire to particularly stress.

Once again we would point out that unless we differentiate between things that differ there is bound to be confusion and error. So here. We must distinguish between the *way* of access which Christ has opened for sinners into the presence of God, the *qualifications* which are required from those entering that way, and the *exercise* of those qualifications

so that the way is actually used. But the moment we mention “qualification” and the necessity for “exercising” the same, some will demur, insisting that we are thereby sounding a legalistic note and destroying the simplicity of the Gospel. Then let us ask—such objectors, Are hypocrites entitled to use that way of access which Christ has opened? Do “Christians” who exercise no faith, but simply offer cold and mechanical prayers, enter into God’s presence? If the objector answers No—as honesty compels him to do—then he has granted our contention, whether or not he agrees with us in detail.

How many professing Christians do really obtain personal access to and enjoy conscious communion with the Holy One? What percentage of real Christians are actually accustomed to do so? Alas, what multitudes have been deceived by Satan into supposing that all they have to do is get down on their knees, plead the name of Christ, and automatically they obtain audience with the Most High. Not so. It still holds good that, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; *but* your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:1, 2). The principles of the Divine government know no alteration, and allowed and unconfessed sins act as an impassable barrier between the soul and God as truly today as they did under the Old Testament economy. No change of dispensation modifies the requirements of God’s holiness or reduces the enormity of sin.

Three things are absolutely necessary if any is to have access to God. First, he must have the legal right or title to do so. Second, he must possess the necessary moral fitness. Third, he must be spiritually and experimentally empowered. Our legal right to approach unto God is found alone in the merits of Christ: His sacrificial work and the present exercise of His Priesthood give me title to draw near unto the Throne of Grace. But does that cover the whole matter? Is nothing more than a legal title required? Ah, the real saint knows otherwise from painful experience. How often has he entered his closet, sought audience with the Divine Majesty, pleaded the blood of Christ, yet without any conscious access. So far from any conscious approach to Him, God seems far off, and all is darkness and deadness in the soul. Like the Spouse in the Canticles, he seeks his Beloved, but finds Him not.

“Behold I go forward, but He is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive Him. On the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him” (Job 23:8, 9). Has that painful experience of Job’s never been duplicated in your own? Was his case altogether exceptional? Far from it, as the recorded lamentations of others of God’s children clearly show. “Why standest Thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?” (Psa. 10:1). Yes, even the sweet Psalmist of Israel knew what it was to feel God’s distance from him and to be denied conscious access to Him. “How long wilt Thou forget me, O LORD, forever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?” (Psa. 13:1). Again and again this was his agonizing experience. And there are seasons in the history of all believers when such language is just as suitable to express their experience as Psalm 46 or Psalm 150 is suited to their cases on other occasions.

“For through Him we both have access *by one Spirit* unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18). The words we have placed in italics present another vital aspect of our subject, showing as they do the Christian’s dependence upon the agency of the Holy Spirit. Herein each person of the blessed Trinity is accorded His own distinctive place in the economy of re-

demption: access is unto the Father, it is *through* Christ, but it is *by* the Spirit. The sinful believer can no more approach unto the Father without the gracious operations of the Spirit than he could without the mediation of the Lord Jesus. One has procured for us the legal right; the Other supplies the experimental enablement. The exercise of faith, as we shall yet see, is another essential prerequisite for drawing near to God, but the actings of faith lie not within our own unaided power—He who first imparted this heavenly gift must quicken and energize it if it is to function properly.

“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” What place is given to this part of the Truth in most sections of Christendom today? None at all. And even where the third Person of the Godhead is duly owned and honoured, how feebly do the saints apprehend their imperative need of the Spirit’s daily working within them. His operations are essential if our leaden hearts are to be raised above the things of time and sense, if our affections are to flow forth unto their rightful Object, if faith is to be duly acted upon Him, if a sense of His presence is to be communicated unto the soul. But will the Spirit perform these gracious operations if we are indifferent as to whether or not our conduct grieves Him? If a Christian has spent his evening at the card-table or the theatre, and before retiring to rest bows his knees, will the Holy Spirit, at that time, draw out the heart of such an one and grant him conscious access to the Father?

What has just been raised brings us to still another aspect of our subject—there must be a *moral fitness* if the suppliant is to obtain access to God. Alas, that so little is heard about this in the ministry of the day. Yet the reason for this omission is not far to seek: where the dominant object is the pleasing of the hearer, little will be said in condemnation of a carnal walk, and still less of the serious consequences thereof. But though the pulpit has become so unfaithful, God abides faithful, and He will not wink at evil doing. No, not in His own children, nor will He allow the sacred name of Christ to be used as a passport into His presence by the workers of iniquity. Is it not written, “With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the obstinate Thou wilt show Thyself obstinate” (Psa. 18:26); that means what it says, and says what it means.

Loose walking severs communion with God, and then will He act distantly toward us. An earthly parent (who is prudent) will not conduct himself with the same familiarity and cordiality toward a disobedient child as he will unto a dutiful one. Our folly must be repented of and humbly acknowledged before fellowship can be restored with God. Yea, even if our fault be only against a fellow-creature it must be righted before God will accept our worship: “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23, 24)—how many are unable to obtain conscious access to God through failure at this very point! “Turn ye unto Me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you” (Zech. 1:3): if we would have God turn unto us in mercy we must turn unto Him in obedience.

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access *by faith* into this grace” (Rom. 5:1, 2). This brings before us still another aspect of our subject: the necessity for the *exercise* of *faith* in order to approach God. The same truth is presented again in, “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him” (Eph. 3:12). Faith is the appointed means of access, for it is the hand which receives every blessing from God. Faith in God’s willingness to grant us an audience, faith in the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice to pro-

vide us with the title of approach: faith in the Divine promises that if we contritely confess our sins He will cleanse us therefrom. At first a small degree of faith enables the Christian to approach unto God, but as he advances in the knowledge of his own heart and of God's hatred of sin, stronger faith needs to be exercised if we are to draw near the heavenly Throne with confidence. Yet we must be very careful not to mistake blatant presumption for holy assurance.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil (that is to say, His flesh); and having a High Priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22). This is what may be termed the classic passage on our present theme, gathering up as it does into one comprehensive statement the essential features thereof. But what a solemn example it affords of the lack of proportion which now so generally prevails: we are probably safe in saying that for every once verse 22 is quoted, verse 19 is cited 20 times. It is this *disproportion* which has distorted the Truth and led to the error mentioned by us in the earlier paragraphs. Let us now carefully examine these verses.

The passage opens by announcing that Christians have “liberty” (margin) or a “freedom with confidence” to approach unto God, this language presenting a designed contrast from the case of national Israel under the old economy. This liberty to draw near unto the heavenly Mercy-seat is “by the blood of Jesus.” The foundation of all confidence in our access to God and the title to approach unto Him lies in the infinitely meritorious sacrifice which Christ offered unto God on our behalf, and this we must ever plead before Him. Our encouragement so to do lies in the office which our Saviour now exercises on behalf of His people, namely, “High Priest over the house of God.” This is most blessedly brought before us in, “for we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin: let us *therefore* come boldly (freely) unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15, 16).

In what next follows in our passage we are shown the way or manner in which we are to make use of the unspeakable privilege described in verses 19-21. In other words, we are required to meet the terms of verse 22 if we are to enjoy conscious access unto the thrice holy God. First, let us draw near with “a true heart.” This is the principal qualification. A “true heart” is one that beats true unto God. It denotes sincerity in contrast from hypocrisy. It is not the reverent posture of the body or the language of the lips with which God is chiefly concerned, but rather with the heart—the seat of our affections. They who worship Him, “must worship Him in spirit and in truth,” or their performance is utterly futile. The mere outward performance of religious duties, no matter how scrupulously undertaken, is not sufficient—it is with the sincerity of our *hearts* God has chief regard to in all our approaches unto Him. God will bear with infirmities, but not with hypocrisy.

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” This makes known the principle which is to be exercised in our approaches unto God, for, “without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). None but a genuine believer can obtain access unto God: all others are rigidly excluded. There must be the actual ex-

ercise of faith in every spiritual work: “by *faith* Abel offered unto God” etc. (Heb. 11:4). The “full assurance of faith” does not here signify a firm knowledge of our sonship, but an implicit confidence in the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice and priesthood. Many Hebrews who had received in general the faith of the Gospel were wavering in their minds about the Person and office of Christ and the glorious things predicated of Him by the Apostle, and therefore he stresses the fact there must be a firm conviction of the reality and efficacy of the Atonement if we are to draw near unto God.

“Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Here is the twofold preparation prescribed unto us for the right performance of this duty. In these expressions there is an obvious allusion unto the necessary preparations for Divine worship made by Israel under Judaism. As there were various ways in which the Jews became ceremonially and legally defiled, so there were various means appointed for their purification (Heb. 9:13). Those institutions the Apostle now applies spiritually: “our hearts” and “our bodies” signify the inward and the outward man. “Bodies washed with pure water” has no reference to baptism, but is to be understood of our members being preserved from evil and used for God. Rightly did John Owen say at the close of his exposition of these verses, “Universal sanctification upon our whole persons and the mortification in an especial manner of outward sins are required of us in our drawing nigh unto God.”

“Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” has reference to an efficacious application of the blood of Christ unto sanctification or internal purification, so that the burden of guilt is removed. This is accomplished originally in the communication of regenerating grace at the new birth, and is repeated whenever the Spirit grants a fresh renewal and experience of the virtues of the Atonement. That a good conscience is an indispensable qualification for access to God is seen from, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14), where “serve” signifies communion and worship. When the conscience is unpurged, the weight of condemnation lies so heavily upon it that we are then at a loss in approaching the Holy One.

Now to sum up. It is one thing to know theoretically the legal way and right of approach unto God, but it is quite another to enjoy conscious access to Him. For that, the aid of the Spirit is imperative, but He will not perform His gracious operations within us if He be grieved. If we have spent the night in ransacking the newspapers, in worldly conversation, or in backbiting the servants and saints of God, think you that the Holy Spirit will draw out your heart unto the Father when you perform your evening devotions? Not so, unless you penitently confess those sins, and sincerely determine there shall be no repetition of them. “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8). What has been before us was strikingly foreshadowed of old in connection with the approach of Israel’s priests unto God: first the blood was applied to their persons, then the oil (emblem of the Spirit), and then they washed at the laver.—A.W.P.

PATIENCE.

“As I gathered from your letter that the Lord Himself had been your Teacher, in an *immediate* way, not by the usual means, He, no doubt, continues that good work He has begun, and in His own way, for His work is all of a piece and, like His Word, is perfect; and in no two does it appear alike in all its circumstances, though in substance the same. Every man has his peculiar measure of faith and grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Some have trials different from others, but all have a corrupt nature, a never-ceasing adversary, and a wicked world to pass through and contend with. Many set off to run through this host in hope of obtaining the prize at the end, for it is the good thing at the end that sets all off who run in the race that is *not to the swift*. Legal obedience never made a man run. The fear of destruction drives them to their service, and the terrible majesty of God, clothed in clouds and darkness, urges them to their duty, and self-will and self-pleasing help them on. David says, ‘I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.’ It is a sense of the Lord’s *goodness*, felt now, that animates us to run after His everlasting favour and life. But this must be run with patience: ‘Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but *one* receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain.’

“Many have started with me whom I have *envied*, and looking at one and another, have secretly and openly repined that I have not this man’s strength, and that man’s liveness; making sure that they must obtain. Then one has outstripped me a vast way, and I have apparently lost ground by looking at the different competitors, and have concluded that let him who might receive the prize, I never should; so has my heart fretted against the Lord, because He has not given *me* what I have seen and admired in *others*. But after a while I have seen the strongest stand still, unable to go on; and finding they could not succeed, out of envy and malice, through disappointment, have given up, and wandered from the way of understanding; others have held on, but gradually grown feeble, lost their vigour and alacrity through the entanglements of the world, and at last, when almost apparently at the point when they should receive, have been left destitute of that faith by which we enter into rest.

“Some keep on, as Paul says, from mere envy and strife, and are never so much alive, so strong, so zealous, and so earnest, as when they have a saint to revile, to oppose; and all of this in pretense of love to Christ, supposing to add affliction to our bonds. And after all this I remain, and am obliged to look within at the work of the Lord in me, and every examination and proof only serves to make me satisfied from myself, not with myself, but *from* myself, from that fountain of Israel, which, in Christ Jesus, I have ever found when needed in my heart; and I believe some of it has run out and refreshed others also.

“And now I find that I much need *patience*, to let everyone go on his own pace, *envying none*, but to be content with the portion appointed for me, and to bear up under all the disappointments, vexations, burdens and troubles I meet with, often thinking I stand quite still, or rather am driven back, but, upon the whole, find this to be true, ‘Having obtained help of God, I continue to this day.’ But nothing does allure, animate, or communicate strength save our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore I look to Him as the Author and Finisher of my faith, through the grace that is given unto me, and a view of His love in undertaking and finishing for me the whole of my salvation, attended with a rich experience in my soul, which wonderfully charms, draws, and invigorates my spirit, till I forget the difficulties, in the kindness of Him who bears me up and bears me along.

“As to perplexing ourselves with anything beside (if there were anything beside them) the keeping these two commandments, it is fruitless: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,’ and ‘love one another’ as He hath given us commandment; these are the only two things which John says are not grievous, they bring no trouble nor disappointment in themselves, though to keep them must be in opposition to the most dreadful enemies of our Lord. But He who gives us power to believe, and teaches us to love, also keeps us, and that as the apple of the eye. We are made the tenderest part of Himself, by union with Him; and in us and through us the glory of God and of His Son shines forth with lustre to all eternity, all His perfections being in us—‘out of *Zion*, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.’ It is His gentleness which is His eyelid, and which preserves or keeps us. How insensible is the twinkling of the eye, yet most effectual. We do not always observe it, because it is momentary.

“The Lord preserved David withersoever he went, and he says it was His *gentleness* made him great. But when observed, there is a sweet peace, quietness, and unction attended with a clear and blessed discovery and vision of the goodness of the Lord, and we can plainly make out what the Psalmist means, when he says, ‘The Lord’s eyelids try the children of men’—since His gentleness, goodness, and peaceableness have never met with any other return than perverseness, rebellion, enmity, and ingratitude. The hardness and impenitence of the heart none know but they who understand the *goodness* of the Lord, and are brought to loathe themselves for their iniquity, and then they can see and feel that of all injured beings, God stands first and most; yet does this place Him in the most honourable and admirable of all points of view, secures to Himself a full justification, and brings all the guilt of sin and all the charge of destruction upon the sinners among men; so that all flesh must be silent when He rises up out of His holy habitation.”—Letter by W. J. Brook.

Spiritual patience is something more than a passive grace which enables us to meekly endure trials and quietly wait the Lord’s deliverance. It is also an active principle which causes us to *run* the race set before us, which prompts us to persevere in the face of discouragements, which moves us to hope unto the end. It must not be mistaken for that *natural* listlessness or fatalistic inertia which is often wrongly termed “patience.”—A.W.P.

