

**Volume 19—Studies in the Scriptures—Number 10**  
**October, 1940**  
**THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL.**

“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). Gladly would we tarry and seek to extract from this remarkable verse something of its inexpressible sweetness, that we may be more firmly established in the Faith and that our souls may be nourished thereby. But as God’s people of old were required to eat the paschal lamb with “bitter herbs,” so we are called upon to take to heart the fearful price which had to be paid for our salvation. “The redemption of their souls is precious” or “costly” (Psa. 49:8): so infinitely costly that the Holy One was “made sin” for us. This was a Divine transaction, a profoundly mysterious one, yet one which is presented for faith to receive. It lies at the very core of the Gospel, and our peace depends very largely upon a right understanding thereof.

It is only by diligently comparing passage with passage and allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture that we shall be preserved from serious error at this vital point. First, then, we turn to the great type of this unique transaction. On the annual day of atonement, we are told that, “Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat *shall bear upon him* all their iniquities into a land not inhabited” (Lev. 16:21, 22). Thus there was in figure an actual transference of all the iniquities of God’s people unto the head of the victim. In like manner, we are informed, “the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all” (Isa. 53:6), and therefore does the Apostle declare of Christ, “Who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

To say that Christ’s being “made sin for us” means that God appointed Him to be a *sin-offering* in our stead, does not go back far enough: nothing could be offered as an expiatory sacrifice unless and until sin had been imputed to it—note the laying of the offerer’s hands upon the head of the animal *before* slaying it in Leviticus 1:4, 5 and 4:4. Christ not only endured the full penalty which our sins deserved, but the very guilt and breach of the Law was charged to Him. How definitely our sins *were* made (legally constituted) His, appears from His actually confessing them as His own: “For innumerable evils have compassed Me about: *Mine iniquities* have taken hold upon Me” (Psa. 40:12). He owned—see verses 7 and 8 for the identification of the Speaker. So again He declared, “O God, Thou knowest My foolishness, and My sins are not hid from Thee” (Psa. 69:5)

To say that Christ’s being “made sin” signifies that He was *paid its wages* or caused to suffer the penalty of His people’s transgressions is also an inadequate and faulty definition, for it confounds an effect with its cause. Christ could not have been punished for sin unless He had stood guilty in the sight of the Law: punishment always supposes guilt, personal or imputed. Christ was culpable in the eyes of the Law because He took the place of and acted as the Sponsor for His sinful people; the awful load of the accumulated guilt of all their iniquities being laid upon Him. The Lord Jesus was “made sin *for us*”: that is, in our place, for the idea of substitution is necessarily involved in the very nature of this transaction. The spotless Victim occupied the room of the foul violators of the

Law, and therefore He must die. Because He was “made sin” He was also “made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13): the latter being the consequence of the former.

But though legally identified with us, the Sponsor and Surety must not be personally confounded with ourselves. Whether we regard Christ personally as Immanuel or officially as Substitute, He always occupied a place which pertained to Him alone. The fact of His bearing His people’s sins never brought Him down morally to their personal condition. When the fearful guilt of our transgressions lay upon Him, His own personal place of holy separateness (Heb. 7:6) was still retained by Him, and recognized by God as retained by Him. Heaven was opened at the Cross, and if on the one hand wrath burning as fire descended on the sacred Person of our Substitute, on the other hand it must be remembered that from the Cross there returned to Heaven, ascending like a cloud, acceptable fragrance which filled the Sanctuary. Beautifully was this brought out in the types: even the fat of the *sin* offering was burned upon the altar for “a sweet savour unto the LORD” (Lev. 4:31), while “sweet incense” was employed on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:12, 13).

The utmost care must be used by us when meditating upon this solemn and sacred mystery. Though it pleased God to make the Sinless One to be sin for us, yet so far from the glory of Christ being tarnished thereby, it was enhanced. Though bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, nevertheless it was the Holy One who bore them: His personal purity unsullied, His immaculate nature uncontaminated. This is made manifest in another, one of the most beautiful of all the types, namely, *the veil*. The veil, which in the tabernacle separated the holy place from the holiest of all, was the appointed emblem of our Saviour’s humanity—of “His flesh” (Heb. 10:20). It was prominently associated with His death, for it was then rent by God “from the top to the bottom” (Matt. 27:51). How blessed, then, to see that the very basis of that veil was *pure white linen*, and that on that basis was displayed (by Christ in life and death alike) the heavenly “blue” as well as the purple and scarlet (Exo. 26:31).

It remains for us now to add a brief word upon *the merits* of Christ. Not only was the Lord Jesus, negatively, exempt from the taint of original sin and free from all personal transgression, but He was perfectly conformed to the whole will of God both in heart and life, rendering complete and perpetual obedience to His Law in thought, word, and deed. And that God-glorifying obedience of His was entitled to reward. Now that perfect obedience which Christ rendered unto the Law was a vicarious one, being performed in the place and on behalf of His people: consequently, as death became the portion of the Substitute, eternal life becomes the certain portion of all whom He represented. Christ was made sin for us that we might be made “the righteousness of God in Him.”—A.W.P.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

### 15. *Fasting*: Matthew 6:16-19.

Our present passage brings before us still another subject upon which multitudes of professing Christians are in much need of instruction. Personally we have never heard a sermon or “Bible reading” on Fasting, and very little has come to our notice thereon which was written during the last 40 years—and most of that “little” left very much to be desired. From conversations and communications with others it appears that our experience has been by no means a singular one, and therefore we do not feel it necessary to apologize for devoting two articles to the above verses. Following our usual custom, we will first deal with our passage generally and topically, comparing with it the teaching of other sections of Scripture on this theme; and then consider our verses more specifically, seeking to expound and apply their terms.

Four hundred years ago Calvin wrote in his “Institutes,” “Let me say something on fasting: because many, for want of knowing its usefulness undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as altogether superfluous; while on the other hand, where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition.” Upon this matter the passing of the centuries has produced little or no improvement, for the very conditions which confronted this eminent Reformer prevail extensively today. If on the one side Romanists have perverted a means unto an end, and have exalted what is exceptional to a principal part of their religious worship, Protestants have gone to an opposite extreme, allowing what was practiced by primitive Christians to sink into general disuse.

Though there may have been much formality and hypocrisy in some who attended to this religious duty, yet that is no reason why the practice itself should be discountenanced and discontinued. Nowhere in our Lord’s teaching is there anything to discourage religious fasting, but not a little to the contrary. Most certainly He was not reprehending this practice in the passage before us, rather was He uttering a caution against hypocrisy therein. By saying, “When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites,” He takes it for granted that His disciples will fast—as much so as He assumes by His, “when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites” (v. 5) that they would be men of prayer. Christ was here engaged in condemning the wicked perversion of the Pharisees, from which He also took occasion to give us valuable instruction upon our present theme.

When the heart and mind are deeply exercised upon a serious subject, especially one of a solemn or sorrowful kind, there is a disinclination for the partaking of food, and abstinence therefrom is a natural expression of our unworthiness, of our sense of the comparative worthlessness of earthly things, and of our desire to fix our attention upon things above. Fasting, either total or partial, seems to have been connected with seasons of peculiarly solemn devotion in all ages. When Jonah testified to a guilty city, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (i.e., if it does not repent and turn to God) we are told, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a *fast*, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed . . . Let neither man nor beast . . . feed nor drink water . . . and cry mightily unto God: yea let them turn everyone from his evil way . . . who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” (Jonah 3:5-9).

There are a number of features about the above incident which are to be carefully noted, for they throw not a little light on several aspects of our present subject. This was no ordinary occasion when the Ninevites fasted, but a time of exceptional gravity, when the black clouds of Divine judgment hung heavy over their heads. It was not a fast undertaken by the individual, but one into which the whole populace entered. It was designed to express their deep humiliation before God and was an appendage unto their crying “mightily” to Him. It was not a duty performed in response to any express commandment from the Lord but was entered into voluntarily and spontaneously. Its object was to divert the fierce anger of Heaven against them, and as the closing verse of Jonah 3 tells us, “And God saw their work, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He had said (provisionally) that He would do unto them, and He did it not.”

Our first main division, then, shall be *occasions* of fasting. Let us preface our remarks thereon by pointing out that what we are about to consider particularly is extraordinary fasting in contradistinction from ordinary. As we shall yet see, Scripture mentions partial fasting as well as total abstinence from food. There is an ordinary fasting which is required from all men, especially from the saints, namely, an avoidance of gluttony and surfeiting, a making a “god” of our belly (Phil. 3:19). This ordinary fasting consists in temperance and sobriety, whereby the appetites are restrained from the use of food and drink which exceeds moderation. We are to be temperate in all things, and at all times. Rightly did the godly Payson point out: “Fasting is not so much by total abstinence from food beyond accustomed intervals, as by denying self at every meal, and using a spare and simple diet at all times—a course well adapted to preserve the mind and body in the best condition for study and devotional exercises.”

Now the occasion of an *extraordinary* religious fast is when a *weighty* cause thereof is offered. This is when some judgment of God hangs over our heads, such as the sword, famine or pestilence. In circumstances of grave danger the pious kings and Prophets of Israel called on the people to engage in fasting as well as prayer. As examples of this we may cite the following. When the hand of the Lord lay heavily upon Israel and thousands fell in battle before the Benjamites, “Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up and came unto the house of God, and wept and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings” (Judg. 20:26). When the Moabites, Ammonites and others combined against Jehoshaphat in battle, we are told that he “set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD” (2 Chron. 20:3, 4). In a time of national calamity Joel cried, “Sanctify ye a fast, call ye a solemn assembly . . . and cry unto the LORD” (1:14).

The second general cause and occasion for fasting is when God is earnestly sought for some special and *particular blessing*, or the supply of some great need. Thus on the annual day of atonement, when remission was sought for the sins of the Nation, the Israelites were most expressly forbidden to do any manner of work, but instead to “afflict their souls” (Lev. 23:29-32). So, too, upon the exodus of the Jews from Babylon Ezra tells us, “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance” (8:21).

In addition to these examples of public fasting, Scripture also mentions that of many pious individuals. When his child by the wife of Uriah was smitten with sore sickness, we

are told that, "David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went and lay all night upon the earth" (2 Sam. 12:16). On another occasion, when sorely beset by enemies, David declared, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psa. 35:13). When Nehemiah was informed that the remnant of his people left of the captivity in the provinces were "in great affliction and reproach" and the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burned with fire, he "sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven" (1:4). When Daniel ardently desired the deliverance of the children of Israel from their captivity in Babylon he, "Set his face unto the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (9:3).

It is a great mistake to suppose that either public or private fasting on the part of the pious was a practice confined to the Old Testament era. Of Anna we read, "She departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). When devout Cornelius ardently desired more light from God concerning the Messiah, he fasted and prayed (Acts 10:30). When the church at Antioch sought God's special blessing upon and success of His servants in the Gospel, they "fasted" (Acts 13:3). In like manner when Paul and Silas were about to establish local churches, they "prayed with fasting" (Acts 14:23), because in a matter of such importance they looked for special directions from God. In 1 Corinthians 7:5 the Apostle gives plain intimation that it was the ordinary and proper custom of Christians to give themselves to "prayer and fasting" when special needs called for the same.

Next, we will consider the *manner* of fasting. Fasting consists in all abstinence from meat and drink, yet not such an abstinence as would impair health or injure the body—which is forbidden in Colossians 2:23, and would clash with Christ's directions that we should pray for our "daily bread." It is the abstinence from such meals as would interfere with an uninterrupted and earnest waiting upon God. Such fasting would primarily be a denying ourselves of all dainties, as Daniel, "ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into his mouth, neither did he anoint himself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled" (10:3). Coupled with the most sparse possible diet, there must also be an abstaining from all the delights of nature (see Joel 2:15, 16). All of this is designed for the afflicting of ourselves, as Paul in his, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Ere proceeding further it should be pointed out that there may be a prolonged abstinence from food and yet no fasting in the Scriptural sense of the term. One may observe a weekly fast, and observe it strictly, and yet not fast at all; if there is no expression of an evangelical sorrow of the soul. The mere abstinence from food is not fasting, any more than the mere moving of the lips is prayer; and certainly there is nothing whatever of it in the denying one's self meats while yet the hunger is appeased with eggs and fish. Unless our fasting is that which marks such a heartfelt sense of sin and of seeking unto God as will brook no diversion from its purpose, moving us spontaneously and for the time being with a lack of appetite for all things else, then it is but a superstition, a piece of morbid formalism.

God is not to be imposed upon by any mere outward performance, no matter how solemnly and decorously it be executed. It is at the heart He ever looks, and unless our hearts be in our fasting we do but mock the Most High with an empty show. Of old He asked Israel, "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those

seventy years, did ye at all fast *unto Me*, even to Me?" (Zech. 7:5). On another occasion He refused to accept the fasting of the people because they were flagrantly setting at naught the precepts of the Second Table, saying, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen—a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free?" (Isa. 58:5, 6). And at a later date the Lord gave orders, "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God" (Joel 2:13).

From the very nature of the case we should never let our minds dwell on the act of fasting, as though we had therein discharged a duty. Fasting is not to be undertaken for the mere sake of fasting. It is not as the doing of penance that we are ever to abstain from food, neither is it as though the abstaining were a process of holiness; still less must we regard it as in anyway a meritorious performance. Private fasting must issue from an urge within and not because it is imposed from without. Private fasting should be spontaneous, the result of our being under a great stress of spirit, and the simple act itself be entirely lost sight of in the engrossing fervor which prompted it. There had been little or no practical difficulties on the subject of fasting if these simple rules had been understood and observed.

And yet, so prone are we to run to extremes, a word of caution is needed here lest what has just been said above be put to an evil use. It would be quite wrong to draw the conclusion, seeing I feel no inward urge to engage in fasting, therefore I am discharged from this duty. The Christian reader should at once perceive that such an argument would be quite invalid in connection with other spiritual duties. If I feel no appetite for the Heavenly Manna or no desire to draw near unto the Throne of Grace, then it is my bounden duty to penitently confess unto God my coldness of heart and beg Him to stir me up afresh unto a hearty use of the appointed means. The same principle most certainly holds good in connection with fasting.

The particular *seasons* for fasting are to be determined mainly by the governmental dealings of God, and therefore those who would improve such seasons must be strict observers of the workings of Providence: otherwise God may be calling aloud for weeping and girding of sackcloth, while we hear not His call but indulge in joy and feasting (Isa. 22:12, 13). As to the amount of time to be spent in either individual or corporate fasting, the duty—the exigencies of the situation—should regulate it and not it the duty. Various lengths of time are mentioned in different cases: see 2 Samuel 12:16; Esther 4:16; Daniel 10:2, 3. "Wherefore I judge that none are to be solicitous as to what quantity of time, more or less, they spend in these exercises, so that the work of the time be done. Nay, I very much doubt men lay a snare to themselves in tying themselves to a certain quantity of time in such cases" (Thomas Boston).

Let us now consider the *purpose* of fasting. Various designs are mentioned in Scripture. The first end in fasting is the denying of self, the bringing of our body and its lusts in subjection unto the will and word of God. Said the Psalmist, "I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach" (69:10)—before men, yes; but not so before God. Our Lord warned us, "Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness" (Luke 21:34). The body is made heavy, its

senses dulled, and the mind rendered sluggish by much eating or drinking, and thereby the whole man becomes unfit for the duties of prayer and hearing of the Word. In order that this unfitness may be avoided and that the lusts of the flesh may be mortified and subdued, fasting is to be duly engaged in.

The second end of fasting is to stir up our devotions and to confirm our minds in the duties of hearing and prayer. In this connection it is to be duly noted that fasting and prayer are almost always linked together in the Scriptures, or it would be more correct to say “prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29, and Acts 14:23)—to intimate the latter is designed as an aid to the former, chiefly in that the non-preparation and participation of meals leaves us the freer for uninterrupted communion with God. When the stomach is full, the body and mind are less qualified for the performance of spiritual duties. For this reason we are told Anna, “served God with fastings and prayers,” the design of the Holy Spirit being to commend her to our notice for the fervency of her spirit, which she evidenced in this manner.

The third end in fasting is to bear witness unto the humiliation and contrition of our hearts, for the denying ourselves of nature’s comforts suitably expresses the inward sorrow and grief we feel over our sins. “Proclaim a fast” is the Lord’s requirement (Joel 1:14) when He would have His people testify their contrition. Surely it is obvious that the participation of creature dainties or the indulgence of self in similar ways is most incongruous at a time when we are mourning before God and declaring our repentance. When convicted of our iniquities, God requires us to turn unto Him with fasting and mourning and with the rending of our hearts.

The fourth end of fasting is to admonish us of our guilt and uncleanness—to put us in mind of our utter unworthiness of even the common mercies of Providence—that we deserve not food or drink. It is designed to make us conscious of our wants and miseries, and thereby make us the more aware of our sins. If the Ninevites were made to perceive the propriety of abstaining from food and drink when the sword of Divine judgment was hanging over their heads, then how much more should we, with our vastly greater light and privileges, be sensible of the same. If we duly “consider our ways” (Hag. 1:5), must we not feel that sackcloth and ashes well become us? The main peril to guard against in our fasting will be considered next month.—A.W.P.

## THE LIFE OF ELIJAH

### 10. *At Zarephath.*

“Change and decay in all around I see.” We live in a mutable world where nothing is stable, and where life is full of strange vicissitudes. We cannot, and we should not expect things to go smoothly for us for any length of time while we are sojourning in this land of sin and mortality. It would be contrary to the present constitution of our lot as fallen creatures for, “man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.” Neither would it be for our good if we were altogether exempted from affliction. Though we are the children of God, the objects of His special favour—yet this does not free us from the ordinary calamities of life. Sickness and death may enter our dwellings at any time: they may attack us personally, or those who are nearest and dearest to us, and we are obliged to bow to the sovereign dispensations of Him who rules over all. These are commonplace remarks, we know—nevertheless they contain a truth of which, unpalatable though it is, we need constantly reminding.

Though we are quite familiar with the fact mentioned above, and see it illustrated daily on every side, yet we are very reluctant and slow to acknowledge its application to ourselves. Such is human nature: we wish to ignore the unpleasant and persuade ourselves that if our present lot is a happy one it will remain so for some time to come. But no matter how healthy we are, how vigorous our constitution, how well provided for financially, we must not think that our mountain is so strong it cannot be moved (Psa. 30:6, 7). Rather must we train ourselves to hold temporal mercies with a light hand, and use the relations and comforts of this life as though we had them not (1 Cor. 7:30), remembering that “the fashion of this world passes away.” Our rest is not here, and if we build our nest in any earthly tree it should be with the realization that sooner or later the whole forest will be cut down.

Like many an one both before and since, the widow at Zarephath might have been tempted to think that all her troubles were now over. She might reasonably expect a blessing from entertaining the servant of God in her home, and a very real and liberal blessing she received. In consequence of sheltering him, she and her son were supplied by a Divine miracle in a time of famine for “many days”; and from this she might draw the conclusion that she had nothing further to fear. Yet the very next thing recorded in our narrative is. “And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him” (1 Kings 17:17). The language in which this pathetic incident is couched seems to denote that her son was stricken suddenly, and so sorely that he expired quickly, before there was opportunity for Elijah to pray for his recovery.

How deeply mysterious are the ways of God! The strangeness of this incident now before us is the more evident if we link it with the verse immediately preceding: “The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which He spake by Elijah. And it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman . . . fell sick” etc. Both she and her son had been miraculously fed for a considerable interval of time, and now he is drastically cut off from the land of the living—reminding us of those words of Christ concerning the sequel to an earlier miracle: “your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead” (John 6:49). Even though the smile of the Lord is upon us and He is showing Himself strong on our behalf, this does not grant us an immunity from the afflictions to which flesh and blood is the heir. As long as



we are left in this vale of tears we must seek grace to “rejoice with trembling” (Psa. 2:11).

On the other hand, this widow had most certainly erred if she concluded from the snatching away of her son that she had forfeited the favour of God and that this dark dispensation was a sure mark of His wrath. Is it not written, “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. 12:6)? Even when we have the clearest manifestations of God’s good will—as this woman had in the presence of Elijah under her roof and the daily miracle of sustenance—we must be prepared for the frowns of Providence. We ought not to be staggered if we meet with sharp afflictions while we are treading the path of duty. Did not Joseph do so again and again? Did not Daniel? Above all, did not the Redeemer Himself?—so, too, with His Apostles. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12).

Let it be duly noted that this poor soul had received particular marks of God’s favour before she was cast into the furnace of affliction. It often happens that God exercises His people with the heaviest trials when they have been the recipients of His richest blessings. Yet here the anointed eye may discern His tender mercies. Does that remark surprise you, dear reader? Do you ask, How so? Why, the Lord, in His infinite grace, often *prepares* His children for suffering by previously granting them great spiritual enjoyments: giving them unmistakable tokens of His kindness, filling their hearts with His love, and diffusing an indescribable peace over their minds. Having tasted experimentally of the Lord’s goodness, they are better fitted to meet adversity. Moreover, patience, hope, meekness, and the other spiritual graces can only be developed in the fire: the faith of this widow, then, must needs be tried yet more severely.

The loss of her child was a very heavy affliction for this poor woman. It would be so to any mother, but it was more especially severe on her, because she had previously been reduced to widowhood, and there would now be none left to support and comfort her declining years. In him all her affections were centered, and with his death all her hopes were destroyed: her coal was now indeed quenched (2 Sam. 14:7) for none remained to preserve the name of her husband on the earth. Nevertheless, as in the case of Lazarus and his sisters, this heavy blow was “for the glory of God” (John 11:4), and was to afford her a still more distinguishing mark of the Lord’s favour. Thus it was, too, with Joseph and Daniel to whom we have alluded above: severe and painful were their trials, yet subsequently God conferred yet greater honour upon them. O for faith to lay hold of the “afterward” of Hebrews 12:11.

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1 Kings 17:18). Alas, what poor, failing, sinful creatures we are! How wretchedly we requite God for His abundant mercies! When His chastening hand is laid upon us, how often we rebel instead of meekly submitting thereto. Instead of humbling ourselves beneath God’s mighty hand and begging Him to show “wherefore” He is contending with us (Job. 10:2), we are far readier to blame some other person as being the cause of our trouble. Thus it was with this woman. Instead of entreating Elijah to pray with and for her—that God would enable her to understand wherein she had “erred” (Job. 6:24), that He would be pleased to sanctify this affliction unto the good of her soul, and enable her to glorify Him “in the fires” (Isa. 24:15)—she reproached him. How sadly we fail to use our privileges.

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” This is in striking contrast from the calmness she had displayed when Elijah first encountered her. The swift calamity which had befallen her had come as a sore surprise, and under such circumstances when trouble overtakes us unexpectedly it is hard to keep our spirits composed. Under sudden and severe trials much grace is needed if we are to be preserved from impatience, petulant outbursts, and to exercise unshaken confidence in and complete submission to God. Not all of the saints are enabled to say with Job, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? . . . the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job. 2:10; 1:21). But so far from such failure excusing us, we must judge ourselves unsparingly and contritely confess such sins unto God.

The poor widow was deeply distressed over her loss, and her language to Elijah is a strange mixture of faith and unbelief, pride and humility. It was the inconsistent outburst of an agitated mind, as the disconnected and jerky nature of it intimates. First, she asks him, “What have I to do with thee?”—what have I done to displease thee? wherein have I injured thee? She wished that she had never set eyes on him if he were responsible for the death of her child. Yet, second, she owns him as “thou man of God”—one who was separated unto the Divine service. She must have known by this time that the terrible drought had come upon Israel in answer to the Prophet’s prayers, and she probably concluded her own affliction had come in a similar way. Third, she humbled herself, saying “Art thou come to me to call *my sin* to remembrance?”—possibly a reference to her former worship of Baal.

It is often God’s way to employ afflictions in bringing former sins to our remembrance. In the ordinary routine of life it is so easy to go on from day to day without any deep exercise of conscience before the Lord, especially so when we are in the enjoyment of a replenished barrel. It is only as we are really walking closely with Him, or when we are smitten with some special chastisement of His hand that our conscience is sensitive before Him. And when death entered her family the question of sin came up, for death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). It is always the safest attitude for us to assume when we regard our losses as the voice of God speaking to our sinful hearts, and to diligently examine ourselves, repent of our iniquities, and duly confess them unto the Lord, that we may obtain His forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).

It is at this very point that the difference between an unbeliever and a believer so often appears. When the former is visited with some sore trouble or loss, the pride and self-righteousness of his heart is quickly manifested by his, “I know not what I have done to deserve this: I always sought to do what is right: I am no worse than my neighbours who are spared such sorrow—why should I be made the subject of such a calamity?” But how different is it with a person truly humbled. He is distrustful of himself, aware of his many shortcomings, and ready to fear that he has displeased the Lord. Such an one will diligently consider his ways (Hag. 1:5), reviewing his former manner of life and carefully scrutinizing his present behaviour, so as to discover what has been or still is amiss, that it may be set right. Only thus can the fears of our mind be relieved and the peace of God confirmed in our souls.

It is this calling to mind our manifold sins and judging ourselves for them which will make us meek and submissive, patient and resigned. It was thus with Aaron who, when

the judgment of God fell so heavily upon his family “held his peace” (Lev. 10:3). It was thus with poor old Eli who had failed to admonish and discipline his sons, for when they were summarily slain, he exclaimed, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good” (1 Sam. 3:18). The loss of a child may sometimes remind parents of sins committed with respect to it long previously. So it was with David when he lost his child by the hand of God smiting it for his wickedness (2 Sam. 12). No matter how heavy the loss, how deep his grief, when in his right mind the language of the saint will ever be, “I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psa. 119:75).

Though the widow and her son had been kept alive for many days, miraculously sustained by the power of God, while the rest of the people had suffered, yet she was less impressed by the Divine beneficence than by His taking away her child: “What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” While she seems to acknowledge God in the death of her son, she cannot shake off the thought that the Prophet’s presence was responsible for it. She attributes her loss to Elijah: as though he had been commissioned to go to her for the purpose of inflicting punishment upon her for her sin. As he had been sent to Ahab to denounce the drought upon Israel for their sin, so now she was afraid of his presence, alarmed at the very sight of him. Alas, how ready we are to mistake the grounds of our afflictions and ascribe them to false causes.

“And he said unto her, Give me thy son” (1 Kings 17:19). In the opening paragraph of last month’s article, we pointed out how that the second half of 1 Kings 17 presents to us a picture of the domestic life of Elijah, his deportment in the widow’s home at Zarephath. First, he evidenced his contentment with the humble fare, expressing no dissatisfaction with the unvarying menu day after day. And here we behold how he conducted himself under great provocation. The petulant outburst of this agitated woman was a cruel one to make unto the very man who had brought deliverance to her house. Her “art thou come to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?” was uncalled for and unjust, and might well have prompted a bitter reply. It had undoubtedly done so had not the subduing grace of God been working within him, for Elijah was naturally of a very warm temper.

The wrong construction which the widow placed upon Elijah’s presence in her home was enough to shake any person. Blessed is it to observe there was no angry reply made to her inconsiderate judgment, but instead a “soft answer” to turn away her wrath. If one speaks to us unadvisedly with their lips that is no reason why we should descend to their level. The Prophet took no notice of her passionate inquiry and thereby evidenced that he was a follower of Him who is “meek and lowly in heart,” of whom we read, “Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again” (1 Peter 2:23). “Elijah saw that she was in extreme distress and that she spoke as one in great anguish of spirit; and therefore, taking no notice of her words, he calmly said to her, ‘Give me thy son’; leading her at the same time to expect the restoration of her child through his intercession” (J. Simpson).

It may be thought that the last words cited above are entirely speculative: personally we believe that they are fully warranted by Scripture. In Hebrews 11:35 we read, “Women received their dead raised to life again.” It will be remembered that this statement is found in the great Faith chapter, where the Spirit has set forth some of the wondrous achievements and exploits of those who trust the living God. One individual case after another is mentioned, and then there is it grouping together and generalizing: “who

*through faith* subdued kingdoms, etc., etc.—women received their dead raised to life again.” There can be no room for doubt that the reference here is to the case now before us and the companion one in that of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:17-37). Here, then, is where the New Testament again throws its light upon the earlier Scriptures, enabling us to obtain a more complete conception of that which we are now considering.

The widow of Zarephath, though a Gentile, was a daughter of Sarah, to whom had been committed the faith of God’s elect. Such a faith is a supernatural one, its Author and Object being supernatural. When this faith was first born within her we are not told—very likely while Elijah was sojourning in her home, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”—(Rom. 10:17). The supernatural character of her faith was evidenced by its supernatural fruits, for it was in response to her faith (as well as to Elijah’s intercession) that her child was restored to her. What is the more remarkable is that, so far as the Word informs us, there had been no previous case of the dead being brought back again to life. Nevertheless, He who had caused a handful of meal to waste not and a little oil in a cruse to fail not while it sustained three people for “many days,” surely *He* could also quicken the dead. Thus does faith reason: nothing is impossible to the Almighty.

It may be objected that there is no hint in the historical narrative of the widow’s faith as to the restoring of her son to life, but rather that to the contrary. True, yet this in no wise makes against what has been pointed out above. Nothing is said in Genesis about Sarah’s faith to conceive seed, but instead her skepticism is mentioned. What is there in Exodus to suggest that the parents of Moses were exercising faith in God when they placed their son in the ark of bulrushes?—yet see Hebrews 11:23. One would be hard put to it to find anything in the book of Judges which suggests that Samson was a man of faith, yet it is clear from Hebrews 11:32 that he was. But if nothing is said in the Old Testament of her faith, we may also note that the unkind words of the widow to Elijah are not recorded in the New Testament—any more than the unbelief of Sarah or the impatience of Job—because they are blotted out by the blood of the Lamb.—A.W.P.

## THE DOCTRINE OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

### 5. Its Extent.

When seeking to unfold some other great truths of Scripture, by means of contemplating separately their component parts, we had occasion to remind the reader how very difficult it was to avoid some overlapping. The same thing needs to be pointed out here in connection with the subject we are now considering. A river has many tributaries and a surveyor must necessarily trace out each one separately, yet he does so with the knowledge that they all run out of or run into the same main stream. A tree has many boughs, yet though distinct members of it they often interweave. So it is with our present theme, and as we endeavour to follow out its various branches there is of necessity a certain measure of repetition. Though in one way this is to be regretted, being apt to weary the impatient, yet it has its advantages, for it better fixes in our minds some of the principal features.

Following our introductory remarks, we began by showing the solemn *reality* of man's spiritual impotency, furnishing clear proofs thereof from Holy Writ. Next, we endeavoured to delineate in detail the precise nature of man's inability: that it is penal, moral, voluntary, and criminal. Last month we dwelt upon the *root* of the awful malady, evidencing that it lies in the corruption of our very nature. We are now to consider the extent of the spiritual paralysis which has seized upon fallen man's being. Let us state it concisely before elaborating and offering confirmation. The spiritual impotency of the natural man is total and entire, irreparable and irremediable as far as all human efforts are concerned. Fallen man is utterly indisposed and disabled—thoroughly opposed to God and His law, wholly inclined unto evil. Sooner would thistles yield grapes than fallen man originate a spiritual volition.

At the close of last month's article we supplied a number of proofs that man's nature is now thoroughly corrupt. This is seen in the fact that he is sinful from his earliest years, yea, that the first dawns of reason in a child are fouled by sin. It appears, too, in that men sin continually: as Jeremiah 13:23 expresses it, they are "accustomed to do evil." It is also evidenced by the universal prevalence of this disease, for it is not only some, or even the great majority, but *all without exception* are depraved. It is demonstrated by their freedom therein. All sin continually of their own accord: a child has only to be left to himself and he will quickly put his mother to shame. Moreover, they cannot be restrained: neither education nor religious instruction, expostulation or threats (human or Divine) will deter them: that which is bred in the bone, comes out in the flesh. Corruption can neither be eradicated nor moderated. The tongue is a little member, yet God Himself declares it is one which "no man can tame" (James 3:8).

"The *law of sin* which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). The first thing which attends every law as such is its rule or sway: "the law hath dominion over (literally "lordeth it over") a man as long as he liveth" (Rom. 7:1). The giving of law is the act of a superior, and it belongs to its very nature to exact obedience by way of dominion. Now the "law of sin" possesses no moral authority over its subjects, but because it exerts a powerful and effectual dominion over its slaves it is rightly denominated a "law." Though it has no rightful government over men, yet it has the equivalent, for it dominates as a king—"sin hath *reigned* unto death" (Rom. 5:21). Because believers have been delivered from the complete dominion of this evil monarch, they are exhorted, "Let not sin therefore *reign* in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12.). Here we learn

what is the precise case with the unregenerate: sin reigns, undisputedly, within them, and they yield ready and full obedience thereto.

The second thing which attends all law as such is its *sanctions*, which have an efficacy to move those who are under it unto the things which it requires. In other words, a law has rewards and penalties accompanying it, which serve as inducements to obedience, even though the things commanded are unpleasant. Speaking generally, all laws owe their efficacy unto the reward and punishments annexed to them. Nor is the “law of sin”—indwelling corruption—any exception. The pleasures and profits which sin promises unto its subjects are rewards which the vast majority of men lose their souls to obtain. We have a striking illustration of this when the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:25, 26).

In the above example we see the conflict which was in the mind of Moses between the law of sin and the law of grace. The motive on the part of the law of sin, whereunto it sought to influence him and wherewith it prevails over the majority, was the temporary reward which it set before him, namely, the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin: by that it contended with the eternal reward annexed to the law of grace, called here “the recompense of the reward.” By this wretched reward does the law of sin keep the whole world in obedience to its commands. How powerful and potent this influence is, both Scripture, observation, and personal experience teach us. This it was which induced our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit, Esau to sell his birthright, Balaam to hire himself to Balak, Judas to betray the Saviour. This it is which now moves the vast majority of our fellows to prefer Mammon than God, Belial than Christ, the things of time and sense than spiritual and eternal realities.

The law of sin also has *penalties* with which it threatens any who are urged to cast off its yoke. These are the sneers, the ostracism, the persecutions of their fellows. The law of sin announces to us votaries that nothing but unhappiness and suffering is the portion of those who would be in subjection to God, that His service is a “kill-joy.” It represents the yoke of Christ as a grievous burden, His Gospel as quite unsuited to those who are young and healthy, the Christian life as a gloomy and miserable thing. Whatever troubles and tribulations come upon the people of God because of their fidelity to Him, whatever hardships and denying of self the duties of mortification require, are represented by the law of sin as so many penalties attending the neglect of its commands. By these it prevails over the “fearful and unbelieving,” who have no share in the Life eternal (Rev. 21:8). And it is hard to say wherein lies its greater strength: its pretended rewards, or its pretended punishments.

The power and effect of this law of sin appears from its very *nature*: it is not an outward, inoperative, directing law, but an inbred, working, and effectual law. A law which is proposed *to* us cannot be compared for efficacy with a law bred *in* us. God wrote the moral law upon tables of stone and now it is found in the Scriptures; but what is its efficacy? As it is external to men and proposed unto them, does it enable them to perform the things which it requires? No indeed, the Moral Law is rendered “weak through the flesh” (Rom. 8:3)—indwelling corruption makes it impossible for man to meet its demands. And how does God deliver from this awful bondage? In this present life by making His

law *internal* for His elect, for at their regeneration He makes good that promise, "I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). Thus His law now becomes an internal, living, operative, and effectual principle within them.

Now such is "the law of sin": it is all *indwelling* law. It is "sin that dwelleth in me," it is "in my members": yea, it is so far in a man as in one sense it is said to be the man himself. "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:21, 23, 18). From this consideration we may perceive the full dominion which it has over the natural man. It always abides in the soul, and is never absent. It "dwelleth" in us: there is its constant residence. It does not come upon the soul only at certain seasons, for then much might be accomplished during its absence, and the soul might fortify itself against it. No, it never leaves its abode. Wherever we are, whatever we be engaged in, this law of sin is present. Whether we are alone or in company, by night or by day, it is our constant companion. A ruthless enemy indwells our soul. How little is this considered by men! O the woeful security of the unregenerate: a fire is in their bones, fast consuming them. How little does the watchfulness of most professing Christians correspond to the danger of their state.

Being an indwelling law, sin applies itself unto its work with great facility and *ease*. It needs to force open no doors or employ any engines whatever. The soul cannot apply itself to any duty but what it must be by those very faculties in which this law has its residence. Let the mind or understanding be applied unto anything and there is ignorance, darkness, madness to contend with. Take the will, and there is in it spiritual deadness, mulish stubbornness, devilish obstinacy. Are the affections of the heart set upon Divine objects? How can they, when they are wholly inclined toward the world and present things, and are prone to all vanity and defilements? Water rises above its own level. How easy is it, then, for indwelling sin to insinuate itself into all we do, hindering whatever is good and furthering whatever is evil. Does conscience seek to assert itself? then our corruptions soon teach us to turn a deaf ear unto its voice.

The seat of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere declares to be *the heart*. "Out of the heart are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). It is there that indwelling corruption keeps its special residence: it is there this evil monarch holds court. It has invaded and possessed the throne of God within us. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and *madness* is in their heart while they live" (Eccl. 9:3). Here is the source of all the madness which appears in their lives. "All these evil things (mentioned in vv. 21, 22) come from *within* and defile the man" (Mark 7:23). There are many outward temptations and provocations which befall man, which excite and stir them up unto many evils, yet they merely broach the vessel and let out what is stored within it. "An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45): this "evil treasure" or store is the principle of all moral action on the part of the natural man. Temptations and occasions put nothing into men, but only draw out what was in them before. The root and spring of all wickedness lies in the center of our corrupt being.

Let us next consider the outstanding property of indwelling sin: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). That which is here called "the carnal mind" is the same as "the law of sin." It is to be solemnly noted that the carnal mind is not only an enemy, for as such there would be a possibility of some reconciliation with God, but it is "enmity" itself and so not capable of

accepting any terms of peace. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot. The only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy their enmity. So the Apostle tells us, "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10): that is, a supernatural work has been accomplished in the elect on the ground of the merits of Christ's sacrifice, which results in the reconciliation of those who were enemies. But when the Apostle came to speak of "enmity" there was no other way but for it to be destroyed: "Having *abolished* in His flesh the enmity" (Eph. 2:15).

Let it also be duly considered that the Apostle used a noun and not an adjective: "the carnal mind is enmity against God." He did not say that it is merely opposed to God, but it is positive opposition itself. It is not black but blackness; it is not an enemy, it is enmity; it is not corrupt, but corruption itself; not rebellious, but rebellion. As C. H. Spurgeon so succinctly expressed it, "The heart, though it be deceitful, is positively deceitful: it is evil in the concrete, sin in the essence: it is the distillation, the quintessence of all things that are vile; it is not envious against God, it is enmity itself—not at enmity, it is actual enmity." Unspeakably dreadful is this. To the same effect are those fearful words of the Psalmist: "their inward part is very wickedness" (5:9)—beyond that human language cannot go.

This carnal mind is in every fallen creature: not even excluding the infant at its mother's breast. How many who had the best of parents have turned out the worst of sons and daughters? This carnal mind is in each of us every moment of our lives: it is there just as truly when we are unconscious of its presence, as when we are sensible of the risings in us of opposition to God. The wolf may sleep, but it is a wolf still. The snake may slumber amid the flowers, and a child may stroke its back, but it is a snake still. The sea is the house of storms even when it is placid as a lake. And the heart, when we perceive not its ebb and flow, when it belches not forth the hot stones of its corruption, is still the same dread volcano.

The extent of this fearful enmity appears in the fact that *the whole* of the carnal mind is opposed to God: every part, every power, every passion of it. Every faculty of man's being has been affected by the Fall. Take the memory—is it not a solemn fact that we retain evil things far more easily than those which are good? that we can recollect a foolish song much more readily than we can a passage of Scripture! We grasp with an iron hand things which concern our temporal interests, but hold with feeble fingers those which respect our eternal welfare. Take the imagination—why is it that when a man given that which well nigh intoxicates him, or when he is drugged with opium, that his imagination soars as on eagle's wings? Why does not the imagination work thus when the body is in a normal condition? Simply because it is depraved, and unless our body enters a foul element the fancy will not hold high carnival. Take the judgment: how vain, often how *mad* are its reasoning, even in the wisest of men.

This fearful enmity is *irremediable*: "For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Even though Divine grace intervene and subdue its force, yet it effects not the slightest change in its nature. It may not be so powerful and effectual in operation as when it had more life and freedom, yet it is enmity still. As every drop of poison is poison and will infect, as every spark of fire is fire and will burn, so is every part and degree of the law of sin *enmity*—it will poison, it will burn. The Apostle Paul can surely be regarded as having made as much progress in the subduing of this enmity as any man on earth, yet, notwithstanding, he exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am,"



and cried for deliverance from this irreconcilable enmity. Mortification abates its awful force, but it does not effect any reformation in it. Whatever effect Divine grace may work *upon* it, no change is wrought *in* it.

Not only is this awful enmity inbred in every one of Adam's fallen race; not only has it captured and dominated every faculty of our beings; not only is it present within us every moment of our lives; not only is it incapable of reconciliation, but most frightful of all, this indwelling sin is enmity *against God*. In other passages it is exhibited as its own enemy; "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11): those indwelling corruptions are ever seeking to destroy us. This deadly poison of sin, this ruinous law of indwelling evil, ever opposes the new nature or law of grace and holiness in the believer. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit" (Gal. 5:17)—that is, the principle of sin fights against and seeks to vanquish the principle of spirituality. But O dreadful to relate, its proper formal object is God Himself: it is "enmity against God."

This frightful enemy has, as it were, received from Satan the same command which the Assyrians had from their monarch: "fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel" (1 Kings 22:31). It is neither against small nor great, but against Jehovah Himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself. This appears in the judgments which men form of God. What is the natural man's estimate of the Creator and Ruler of this world? Let answer be returned from the vast regions of heathendom. Behold, the horrible superstitions, the disgusting rites, the hideous symbols of Deity, the cruel penances and gross immoralities which everywhere prevail in lands without the Gospel, and consider the appalling abominations which for so long passed and which in numerous instances still pass, under the sacred name of Divine worship. These are not merely the products of ignorance of God, but are the immediate fruits of positive enmity against Him.

But we need not go so far afield as heathendom: the same terrible feature confronts us here at home in Christendom. Witness the multiple and horrible errors which prevail on every side in the religious realm today—the degrading and insulting views of the Most High now held by the great majority of church members. And what of the vast multitudes of those who make no profession at all? They think of and act toward the great Jehovah as One who is to be little regarded and respected. They consider Him as One entitled to very little esteem, yea, scarcely worthy of any notice at all. "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" (Job 21:14, 15)—such is the language of their hearts and lives, if it be not actually so with their lips.—A.W.P.

### THE JUSTICE OF GOD.

We now come to consider, second, its *rule*. Righteousness in creatures is according to some law, which is the rule of it and to which it is conformed: the moral law of God, which is holy, just, and good, is our rule of righteousness or right doing. But the Most High has no law outside Himself: He is a law to Himself. His nature and His will are the law and rule of righteousness to Him. This is an attribute common to the three Persons in the Godhead: necessarily so, since They partake of the same undivided essence. Hence we find the first Person is designated the “righteous Father” (John 17:25), the Son is called “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1), and that it is proper to the Holy Spirit is evident from the fact that He is here to convict the world “of righteousness” (John 16:8). As the present aspect of our subject is of such great importance we must endeavour to give it our best attention.

“The will of God is the highest rule of justice, so that what He wills must be considered just: for this very reason, because He willed it. When it is enquired, therefore, why the Lord did so? the answer must be, Because He would. But if you further ask why He so determined, you are in search of something greater and higher than the will of God, which can never be found” (Calvin’s Institutes, book 3, chapter 3, section 2). How great was the light granted to the eminent Reformer and how clearly and boldly he expressed himself thereon. What a contrast from the obscurity which now obtains in this so-called age of enlightenment, with its ambiguous, hesitant and apologetic declarations. That Calvin was by no means alone in this exalted view will appear from other quotations given below.

In answer to the question, “Why was it that Adam was permitted to fall and corrupt his whole posterity when God could have prevented his fall?” Luther said, “God is a Being whose will acknowledges no cause: neither is it for us to prescribe rules to His sovereign pleasure, or call Him to account for what He does. He has neither superior nor equal, and His will is the rule of all things. He did not therefore will such and such things because they were right and He was bound to will them, but they are therefore equitable and right *because* He wills them. The will of men can indeed be influenced and moved but God’s will never can. To assert the contrary is to undefine Him” (Bondage of Man’s Will). To the same effect Bucer said, “God has no other motive to what He does than His own mere will, which will is so far from being unrighteous, it is justice itself.”

God is absolute Lord, so that “He doeth according to *His will* in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan. 4:35). And why not? Because He not only has the might but also the fullest right to do as He pleases. None was before Him, none is above Him: nay, He has no equal to direct Him, and therefore there is none unto whom He must render an account of His matters. What God ordains for us and what He orders from us is just and right simply because He so wills it. Hence it was that Abraham looked upon it as a righteous act to slay his innocent son. But why did he so esteem it—because the written law of God authorized murder? No. On the contrary, both the law of God and the law of nature pre-emptorily forbade it; but the holy Patriarch well knew that the will of God is the only rule of justice and that whatever He is pleased to command is on that very account righteous.

“What is the justice of God? It is an essential property in God, whereby He is infinitely just in Himself, of Himself, for, from, and by Himself alone, and no other. What is

the rule of this justice? His own free will and nothing else for whatsoever He wills is just, and because He wills it, it is just, and not because it is just therefore He wills it” (James Usher, *Body of Divinity*). In answering the objection that “it is unjust for God to inflict eternal punishment upon temporary offenses, there being no proportion between the infinite and the finite, the Puritan, Thomas Brooks, wisely began his reply by saying: “First, God’s will is the rule of righteousness and therefore whatever He doeth or shall do must needs be righteous. He is Lord of all: He has a sovereign right, and an absolute supremacy over the creature” (Vol. 6, p. 213).

We have added one quotation after another from these renowned servants of God of the past because the truth which we are now labouring has been repudiated in quarters in which it was not to be expected. Even in circles which might justly be termed orthodox—where in the main the onslaughts of infidelity were steadfastly resisted and the “landmarks” of the fathers steadily maintained—the sharp edge of the Spirit’s Sword was dulled and those aspects of Truth most of all repellant to human pride toned down. In their well-meant efforts to refute the errors of Socinians a few even of the Puritans suffered their zeal to override knowledge, so that in their determination to concede nothing unto their opponents, they sacrificed some important elements of the Truth; and only too often later generations have followed *their* lead rather than those who were uncompromising.

In the above paragraph we alluded to those who have, under the guise of magnifying God’s holiness, subordinated the Divine will to the Divine nature, insisting that “things are not just because God has commanded them, but He has commanded them because they are just.” Our meaning is that there was a reason for them in the nature of things, and that therefore He has enforced them by His authority. In plain language they mean that the Most High was not free to frame whatever laws He pleased, but was limited by the fitness of things, that His imperial will must conform to some standard *ab extra* to itself. Before we examine this position more closely, and turn upon it the light of Holy Writ, we will give yet one or two further quotations from eminent servants of God in the past for the purpose of showing how radically it differs from what they taught.

Thomas Manton, who was personal chaplain to Sir Oliver Cromwell, took the position that in contemplating the Divine justice, “God must be considered under a twofold relation: as absolute Lord, and as Governor and Judge of the world. As absolute Lord, His justice is nothing but the absolute and free motion of His own will concerning the estate of His creatures. In this respect God is wholly arbitrary and has no other rule but His own will: He does not will things because they are just, but therefore they are just because He wills them. He has a right of making and framing anything as He wills in any manner as it pleases Him . . . As Governor and Judge, He gives a law to His creatures, and His governing justice consists in giving all their due according to His law” (Vol. 8, pp. 438, 439).

“The will of God is so the cause of all things as to be itself without cause, for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything: so that the Divine will is the *ne plus ultra* of all our inquiries: when we ascend to that, we can go no further. Hence we find every matter resolved ultimately into the mere sovereign pleasure of God as the spring and occasion of whatever is done in Heaven and earth . . . The only reason that can be assigned why the Deity does this or that is because it is His own free pleasure so to do” (from the pen of the author of “Rock of Ages” and other well-known hymns, in his

“Observations on the Divine Attributes”: 1750). Such teaching as this alone preserves the Divine independence and presents the true God in His unrivalled freedom and supremacy, unhampered by anything within or without Himself.

But against this God-exalting teaching it is objected that such postulates obliterate all distinction between God’s sovereignty and His justice, merging the latter entirely into the former. With equal justification might we complain that the objector fails to maintain any distinction between the Divine holiness and the Divine justice, making the former to completely swallow up the latter. Should it be asked, Wherein shall we distinguish between the Divine holiness and justice? We answer, the one has to do more with what God is, the other respects what He does. Or to state it in other words, holiness pertains to the Divine character, justice to His office. Thus, “Justice and judgment are the habitation (and “foundation”) of His throne” (Psa. 89:14), that is, they relate to His public administration, to the government of His creatures. It is as Ruler and Judge that the Divine justice is exercised and displayed.

As to the objection that we obliterate all distinctions between the Divine sovereignty and justice, our reply is that we cannot do otherwise if our thoughts are to be formed entirely by the Scriptures. “Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own *will*” (Eph. 1:11). There is no getting around that explicit statement, and to it we must rigidly subordinate our minds and formulate our theology if we are to “think God’s thoughts after Him.” Observe well it is not here said that God works all things according to the exigencies of His holiness, or according to the dictates of His wisdom, but “according to the counsel of His own *will*.” True, blessedly true, that every volition of His is both a holy and a wise one, yet God alone decided what is holy and what is wise. He is under no law and tied by no rules, but ever acts according to His own good pleasure and that alone—and very frequently He does that which is flatly contrary to *our* ideas both of wisdom and justice.

It is this very fact which infidels and agnostics have sought to make captive out of. In the face of what confronts them both in creation and in providence they have drawn the conclusion that either the Almighty is a capricious or cruel Tyrant, or that having brought the world into existence He has withdrawn and left it to work out its own destiny. They ask, Why are there such glaring inequalities in nature: one child being born normal and another cripple, one enjoying health, and the other being a sufferer all its days? Why are some born under a government which gives them freedom while others are doomed to abject slavery? Why have some men more enlarged understanding than others, and some stronger passions than their neighbours? Why is it that virtue so often passes unrewarded and the wicked flourish and prosper? If it be replied, All of this is the consequence of *sin*, then the infidel asks, Why is there untold suffering among innocent animals?

And what is the answer to these expressions of unbelief, these outbursts of rebellion? How shall we silence those who wickedly affirm that the works and ways of the Most High are stamped with injustice? Or, what is far more to the point, how are young Christians to be dealt with who are disturbed by such troublers of their peace? The blatant enemies of the Lord we can well afford to treat with silent contempt, for the great Jehovah needs no efforts of ours to vindicate His character—in due time He will Himself close their mouths. But as to removing such stumblingstones from the path of our fellow pilgrims, there is but one satisfactory and sufficient way, and that is by maintaining the

sovereign rights of Him with whom we have to do—by insisting that He is the Potter and we but clay in His hands to be molded just as He pleases.

Why has God given light to the sun, grass to the fields, heat to fire, and cold to ice? Why, in short, has He done any of those things which we see He has done when He could easily have done otherwise? There is only one adequate answer: in the varied manifestations of His attributes and in the communication of good or evil to His creatures, God has acted according to the sovereignty of *His own will*. Nor is it to the slightest degree unbecoming that God *should* act thus. Sovereignty is the most godlike of all the perfections of the Divine character, for it is that on which the awful supremacy of the great Jehovah chiefly rests. Our concept of “the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity” would not be raised but lowered if we discovered that He was *hampered* in His actions. The display of His own glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords must take precedence over everything else.

“The Lord is upright . . . there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psa. 92:15). Yet this is patent not to carnal sight, but to the vision of faith alone. The eyes of the naturally blind cannot discern the light of the sun, nevertheless it is full of light. In like manner, the eyes of the spiritually blind are incapable of perceiving the equity of God’s ways, yet they are all righteous. But we repeat, they are righteous not because they are conformed to some external standard of excellence, nor even because they are in harmony with one of the Divine attributes, but solely because they are the ways of Him who “worketh all things after the counsel of His own *will*.” God’s commanding Abimelech to deliver Sarah to Abraham, or else He would destroy both him *and his household*” (Gen. 20:7), may seem unjust in man’s estimation, but has not the great God the right to do as He pleases?

Take the most extreme example of all: God’s choosing one unto eternal life and another unto eternal death. Yet none who, by grace, bow to the authority of Holy Writ find any stumblingblock therein. Though they do not profess to understand the reason for God so acting, yet they unhesitatingly acknowledge His *right* so to do. Distrusting *their* conceptions of justice and injustice, they submit to the high sovereignty of Him who is Lord over all. And it is this very submission which brings to their hearts a peace which passes all understanding. Amid the profound mysteries of life, the perplexities of their own lot, though God’s judgments are a “great deep” and His ways often “past finding out,” they have the unshakable assurance that the Judge of all the earth has done, is doing, and shall do, “*right*.”

And why is it that the believer is so confident that simply because *God* does a thing it is necessarily right and good? Because he has learned this very lesson from the lips of Christ, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11:25, 26). Observe the character in which the Father is here viewed: “Lord of Heaven and earth,” that is, as Sovereign supreme with indisputable right. Note the basis of action which the Redeemer attributes unto Him: “for so it seemed good in Thy sight”: no other explanation is vouchsafed, none other is needed, *that* is all-sufficient. Finally, mark well His “even so”: however strange it may seem to us, *that* closes the door to all impious inquiry and speculation. We are not to be the judges of God’s actions, but the doers of His will. His own “good pleasure” is His only rule.

Moreover, let it not be forgotten that Christ conducted Himself in perfect consonance with His public declarations. In Gethsemane we find that He resolved His sufferings into the sovereign pleasure of the Father. How striking and how blessed to hear Him say, "Thy *will* be done." This is the more remarkable and most pertinent to the point before us when we note that He immediately prefaced His acquiescence by affirming, "Abba Father, *all* things *are* possible unto Thee: take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark 14:36). How plainly do such words expose the error of those who contend there was an absolute necessity why God *must* punish sin, and why if His people were to be pardoned a Substitute *must* suffer in their stead. Christ knew God had willed that He should drink this awful cup, and He meekly submitted thereto, but He made it crystal clear that God had willed this not because His nature demanded the same, but simply because this was the way His own good pleasure had selected.

Those words, "All things are possible unto Thee," in such a connection prove beyond all shadow of doubt that the Father acted *freely*, and without any compulsion from His holiness or justice in appointing Christ to make satisfaction for the sins of His people. Scripture nowhere says that He *can* by no means clear the guilty, but rather that He "*will* by no means clear the guilty" (Exo. 34:7). In like manner the Apostle Paul was moved to write, "What if God *willing* to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). It was not that any necessity of His nature demanded He should do so, but because it was the pleasure of His own imperial will so to do.

As it has been pointed out above, we must distinguish sharply between the absolute freedom possessed by God as Lord over all, and that which His perfections require from Him under the economy He was pleased to institute. His fidelity requires Him to make good His Promises and His veracity to fulfill His threatenings, but He was under no constraint whatever to make *any* promises or threatenings. His justice requires Him to impartially administer the law He has given, but He was under no absolute necessity of framing any law at all. Sin is a disease: could He not have sovereignly healed it had He so pleased? Sins are "debts": was He unable to cancel them had He so desired? Perish such a thought! It is argued that God is "a consuming fire" and that fire cannot *but* burn when it comes into contact with that which is combustible. Have such foolish objectors forgotten that fire burns *only* as God *orders* it so to do? It consumed not the bush, nor the three Hebrews in Babylon's furnace! God "worketh *all* things after the counsel of His own WILL" (Eph. 1:11).—A.W.P.

### XMAS.

“Who hath required *this* at your hand?” (Isa. 1:12). This question was asked Israel of old by Jehovah with regard to their “vain oblations,” which He declared were an “abomination” unto Him. Well may He issue the same searching inquiry to the peoples of Christendom in connection with their annual carnal gratifications and financial extravagances in the celebrating of “Xmas.” Most certainly the Lord Himself does not require it. Nowhere in His Word has He bidden us to celebrate the birth of His Son, and nowhere in the New Testament is there any record that the early Christians did so. Therefore, if even a *religious* commemoration of the incarnation of the Saviour receives not the slightest warrant from the Scriptures, then how much less does the worldly and fleshly celebrating thereof find justification therein?

If, then, *God* has not required anyone to memorialize the birth of Christ, who has? Who are the ones that have introduced and popularized this innovation? The first answer is, *the Papacy*. This is unmistakably evident from the name given to this season, for “Xmas” is but an abbreviation of “Christ-mass.” It is Rome and those sections of Protestantism which never succeeded in completely shaking off her shackles who have engineered this monstrosity. Second, it is *the Mammonites* who saw their opportunity to make capital out of the same. They have commercialized this season for their own mercenary gain, for probably more money changes hand during December than in any three months together. Third, the *lovers of pleasure* have united with the lovers of money to make this season one of festivity and feasting, in which they can gratify their carnal lusts to the full.

There are few things in the world today which so plainly evidence how rapidly and how thoroughly so-called “Protestantism” is being Romanized as the observance of “Xmas” by both church-goers and the masses who make no religious profession. The Papists have been quick to seize such an opportunity for the promotion of Mariolatry. And sad it is to see the watchmen on Zion’s walls asleep at their posts of duty, instead of sounding the alarm. With very few exceptions so-called Protestant churches and chapels yield to the popular demand and have their “special Christmas services.” How the pope and his satellites must chuckle at the folly of those whose fathers once stood as a firm bulwark against her insidious approaches. Reader, you are playing into the hands of Rome if you observe “Xmas.”

There are few things today which more clearly and tragically demonstrate that the line of demarcation between the Church and the world has been blotted out than the way in which those claiming to be saints join arm in arm with the godless at this festive season. What an anomaly! Why the very term “saint” signifies a *separated* one—a one who has severed himself from those who despise and reject his Lord and Saviour. What an anomaly we say, to behold the alleged friends of Christ making common cause with His enemies in an orgy of money-spending, carnal gluttony, and merry making. How empty their claim to belong unto God’s “peculiar people” (Titus 2:14); how worthless their profession that they are “strangers and pilgrims” here (1 Peter 2:11)! Reader, you are acting the part of an utter worldling if you observe “Xmas.”

“I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the Church and the world made broader and stronger. Nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of church members saying, ‘Well, there is no harm in this, there is no harm in that,’ and getting as near to the world as possible. We are to avoid the very appearance of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having

your parties, your children's sports, and all that kind of thing. I would have you doubly jealous; do recollect, church members, that you are to be Christians always, if Christians at all; we do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther's day, you are *always* to wear your regimentals as Christian soldiers, and never, at any time, to say, 'I shall do this just now: it is only once a year; I shall do as the world does; I cannot be out of the fashion.' You must be either out of the fashion or out of the true Church. Recollect that, because the place for Christ's Church is altogether out of the fashion. You are called to go forth without the camp, bearing His reproach. If you want to be in the camp, you cannot be Christ's disciple. You must be a separated one or be lost." (C. H. Spurgeon).

Those words are found in a sermon preached by that fearless man of God in "Xmas" week of 1867. How much stronger would be his language were he on earth today, witnessing the vast majority of church-members joining with the irreligious in this mad saturnalia, for mad it certainly is, even taking it on its lowest grounds. Think of the money which is wasted in the exchange of "Xmas presents"! How tragic to witness, as we did all through last December, little tots, poorly clad, sent out night after night on to the streets, exposed to the bitter cold and snow, singing "Xmas Carols" and calling from house to house for pennies to hand over to their beer-drinking parents: police ignoring such a breach of the law (as they now do the breaking of others) and professing Christians encouraging them by handing them money.

"If any man would come after Me," said the Redeemer, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Saving grace is not merely a theological term but a Divine dynamic, "teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12). But what *denying of self* is there by those who observe "Xmas"? What indeed—it is the very opposite—ungodly and worldly lusts are freely indulged, and instead of heeding that Divine precept, "make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14) it is blatantly trampled underfoot by "the Church" and the world alike. This in itself should be sufficient to open the eyes of real Christians to this glaring evil if they have never been previously warned thereon.

"A merry Christmas." What a travesty! What a mockery! Was the Christ of God accorded a "merry Christmas" when He entered this world? Was He given an open-hearted welcome? Far, very far from it, as the manger cradle manifested. The fact is that His presence was not wanted. "No room" in the inn was indicative, symptomatic, prophetic of the days of His public ministry, when oftentimes He "had not where to lay His head." Behold the Lord of glory, my reader, first opening His incarnate eyes in a stable and then ask yourself is *that* a fit object and subject for merry making? We are well aware that this brief article is likely to be distasteful to some of our readers (because it *condemns* them); but suppose it is a message which *God* has prompted! In such case it will rise up in judgment against you in the Day to come if you disregard its warning and continue to further Rome's activities and join hands with the world in its Christ-insulting merriment.—A.W.P.