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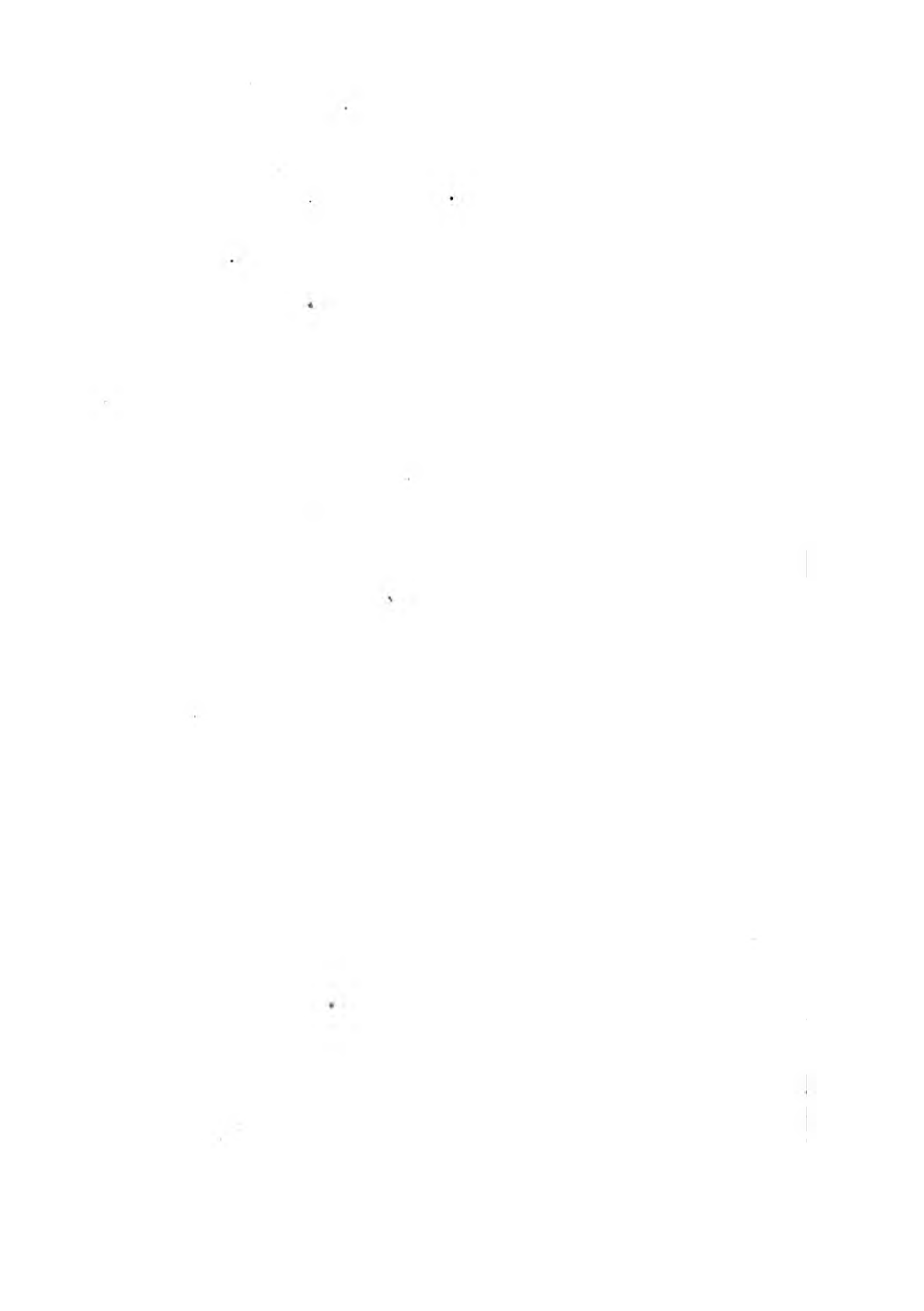


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CHRIST ON THE MOUNT:

A

PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF THE

FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS

OF THE GOSPEL -

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

BY THE

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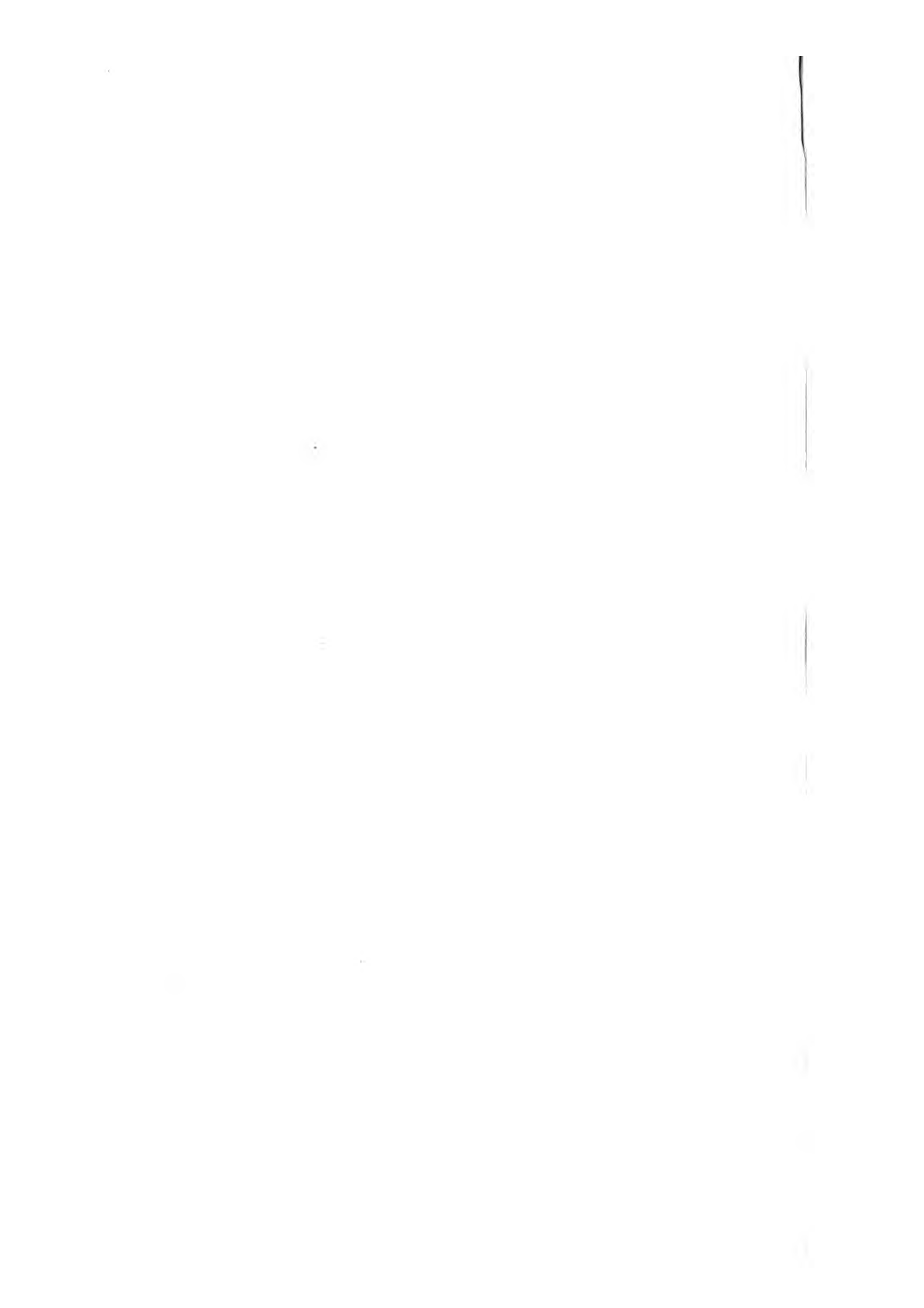
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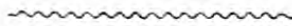
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OCCASION AND PLAN.



CHRIST ON THE MOUNT.



OCCASION AND PLAN.

THE coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was an all-important era in the history of the world. This was the grand event for which all others, from the fall of man, through every successive age, had been gradually preparing. And it was only when the fulness of time had come that Jesus appeared "to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Nor was the world, whether Jewish or Gentile, taken at unawares. The expectation was almost universal, even among idolatrous nations, of the coming about that period of some mighty conqueror. And, more especially among the Jews, was there many a Simeon and Anna devoutly waiting and longing for the consolation of Israel. At length the looked for Messiah appeared. He came unto His own and His own received Him not. They failed to recognize the Saviour of the world in

the humble child of Mary. The Almighty Creator of the universe had become an infant of days. And no sooner does He clothe Himself in that body which had been prepared for Him than He commences a career of sorrow and of suffering. True, the angels of God worship Him, the stars of heaven do homage to their Lord, but man, the very creature sunk in sin whom Jesus had come to save, despises and rejects Him. Herod, the King of Judea, seeks the young child's life. The proud, profligate monarch trembles before the babe of Bethlehem. The hoary-headed sovereign, whose reign has been one unbroken series of deeds of oppression, and murder, and every hateful vice, has at last found a rival whose very name strikes terror to his heart, and that rival—a helpless infant.

But Herod is imagining a vain thing. He is plotting against the Lord's anointed one. There is an eye resting with complacency upon that wondrous child, and that eye is piercing the inmost thoughts of the tyrant's heart. Well had it been for Herod if he had accompanied the eastern strangers to the inn at Bethlehem and done homage to the King of kings. But seventy long years spent in sin have blinded his eyes and hardened his heart, and he coolly and de-

liberately arranges his plans for the murder of the Son of God. Herod is seated in his palace forming his schemes of violence and blood, but He that sitteth in the heavens preserves His elect in whom His soul delighteth. The Lord warns Joseph in a dream to go down into Egypt. The command is instantly obeyed. Joseph and Mary with their precious charge find shelter in a land of strangers. There they contentedly remain until He who had sent them into Egypt enjoins them to return to their own land. They settle at Nazareth in Lower Galilee.

The information which scripture gives in reference to the childhood and youth of Jesus is very scanty. He is said, however, though himself the Lord of all, to have been subject to his parents. Often, doubtless, did Joseph and Mary ponder in their heart those wonderful circumstances which had attended His birth, and the revelations which, from time to time, had been made to them from heaven, as to the mystery of His person, and the glory of His character and office. Nor did they ever witness a single deed, or listen to a single word that was in the slightest degree inconsistent with His divine nature, or with the solemn work which He had undertaken to accomplish. No!
“ He increased in wisdom and in stature, and in

favour with God and man." Dwelling in an obscure town, the very name of which was a term of reproach, "He grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." It would appear, that on reaching the age of twelve years he was so fully and accurately acquainted with the Jewish scriptures that the professed teachers of the law "were astonished at His understanding and His answers." Yet though wiser than all His teachers, and of more understanding than the elders, He refrains for many a long year from commencing the duties of His public ministry.

The period at length arrives which has been appointed of the Father, that important period when He must enter upon the great and momentous work which He had come to accomplish. His wondrous birth thirty years before had now been almost if not altogether forgotten. The star which shone over Bethlehem had long ago disappeared from the heavens. The wise men of the East were in all probability sleeping in the dust. The men of Jerusalem no longer talked with interest of the birth of Israel's King. But amid the moral stillness and death which reigned throughout all Palestine a voice, a solitary voice, was heard crying in the wilderness, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

This was a preacher of righteousness attracting crowds to hear him, not less from the novelty of his doctrines than the singularity of his dress, and the self-denial of his habits. It was John the Baptist, the harbinger of the Son of God. By the terrors of the Lord he sought to persuade men. He preached the law to awaken the conscience, and convicting the Jews of sin, to prepare them for the announcement of a Saviour. The Jewish people were at that period sunk to the lowest state of moral degradation. Their very religion was a strange mixture of formalism, hypocrisy and infidelity. In such an age John appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah. With bold and unsparing hand the lion-hearted prophet exposed the vices of the age. Neither dreading the frowns, nor seduced by the flatteries of men, he denounced the prevailing ungodliness and irreligion of the times, and called upon all men gladly to welcome that Saviour whose coming he had been sent to announce. Multitudes crowded from all quarters to wait upon the ministry of John. Many were deeply impressed by the character and preaching of this man of God. The Spirit carried home the truth to their consciences, and they gladly submitted to be immersed in the waters of John's baptism, confessing their sins and

rejoicing in the prospect of a Saviour about to be revealed.

But while many, we doubt not, were savingly converted under the ministry of John the Baptist, multitudes crowded to the wilderness with no other view than to gratify their curiosity, or to mock the faithful forerunner of the Lord. Pharisees were there—the formalists of their time, whose whole lives had been spent in a mere profession of religion without the slightest feeling of its power; and Sadducees were there—the infidels and Socinians of their time, who denied the resurrection and the world to come. Looking around, therefore, upon the motley crowds that listened to his preaching, John breaks forth into the most sarcastic and withering rebuke: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Nor does he conceal from the Jews that the time of solemn reckoning is at hand. The axe, he warns them, is even now laid at the root of the tree, too sure a token that it must speedily fall. The husbandman has come to survey his vineyard. He expects, he requires, he demands fruit. A rich luxuriant foliage, a profusion of lovely blossoms cannot avail now. The axe is laid at the root, and if there be no fruits of holiness, no evidence of a change of

heart and of life, its doom must be pronounced—"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

The preparations for the entrance of Christ upon His public ministry were now complete. For six months or more had the Baptist been warning the Jews of His approach. At length after many had been baptised by John there appeared on the banks of the Jordan a stranger in humble garb from Nazareth of Galilee. There is no evidence that John had personally known Jesus until He came seeking baptism at his hands. We are inclined to agree with some of the early Fathers that an express revelation of Christ was made to John at that moment; the hitherto fearless prophet now standing in awe. One has approached, before whom John bows in conscious inferiority. "I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?" He could not comprehend how the master should apply for baptism to the servant, the king to the humble subject. But it became Christ to fulfil all righteousness. He had submitted to circumcision, and now He submits to John's baptism. Nor was it an ordinary baptism with water. As he came up out of the water "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him." Thus was the Spirit communicated to Christ without measure prepa-

ratory to His entrance upon His solemn work. Now, more especially, could he adopt the language of the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek! he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." And not only was Jesus at this momentous season owned of the Spirit, He was owned of the Father also; for while Jesus was praying, a voice was heard from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

The Messiah, the Anointed One, consecrated by the baptism of the Holy Ghost goes forth to His work. It was a singularly difficult and important one; and His very first act in entering on His great work betokens that this is none other than He who was to bruise the serpent's head. He enters into mortal con-

flict with the enemy of God and man. The Spirit leads, nay drives Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Then ensued a memorable contest between the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness. Christ was fully equipped for the engagement, and entering the battle-field under the guidance of the Spirit of God He won those laurels that now encircle the brows of all His people; and they rejoice in the full assurance that because He hath overcome they also themselves shall overcome.

Jesus came from heaven to establish a kingdom upon the earth, not a temporal but a spiritual kingdom, a sovereignty over the hearts and the consciences of men. It was of the highest importance, therefore, that at an early period of his public ministry He should lay down in a clear and explicit manner the nature and principles of His kingdom, and what relation it bore to the ancient or Jewish economy. This we conceive was the *occasion* of the sermon on the mount, a sermon the most remarkable that was ever delivered in the hearing of mortal men. Every word of it flowed from the mouth of the holy Jesus, of Him who is emphatically THE TRUTH. If we look back to the period at which the Son of God first began to speak publicly in the ears of men, and think of the ignor-

ance, and obstinacy, and hardness of heart which then characterised the Jewish nation as a body, the extent to which the holy law of God was perverted by the vain traditions of the elders, and the difficulty of recognising the truth amid the errors and absurdities with which the Scribes and Pharisees had mingled it, we cannot wonder that Jesus should have set himself at the commencement of His ministry to recal the minds of the people to the true nature, and spirituality and extent of God's holy and just and good law. To this the leading portion of the sermon is devoted.

The introductory portion, extending from chap. v. 1-19 verses, appears to have been designed to set forth three great points:—1. The character and happiness of believers under the gospel dispensation; 2. The influence of the gospel dispensation upon the world; and, 3. The harmony of the gospel dispensation with the Jewish. All these formed what may be termed the exordium or introduction of the sermon, and were well fitted to prepare the minds of His hearers for the patient and unprejudiced reception of the important truths which were to follow.

Having paved the way by His previous explanations, Jesus exhibits, in the 20th verse, what we consider to be the *subject* of the sermon, properly so called.

The discovery of a righteousness which will meet the demands of God's law, and be fully satisfactory in the sight of a holy God, may be said to be the grand object which man, viewed as a religious being, has ever in view. This is what man needs, and what Christ came to unfold. The design of Jesus throughout the Sermon on the Mount is, to show the utter imperfection and unscriptural character of that righteousness which the Scribes and Pharisees were accustomed to set before the people, both by their teaching and their lives. No better, therefore, no gentler and more truthful statement of His object could have been given, than that which we find in these words—

EXCEPT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, YE SHALL IN NO CASE ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

The sermon itself extends, we conceive, from v. 21, to vii. 12, and is divided into two parts, the first being devoted to an exposure of the *Righteousness of the Scribes*, and the second to an exposure of the *Righteousness of the Pharisees*.

The *first* part of the sermon, reaching to the end of the fifth chapter, we have divided into three chapters :—1. The Perversion of the Moral Law, as exemplified in a View of the Sixth, Seventh, and Third Com-

mandments ; 2. The Perversion of the Civil Law ; and, 3. The Perversion of the Fundamental Principle of all Law.

The *second* part of the sermon, reaching from vi. 1, to vii. 12, is divided into three chapters:—1. The Religious Life of the Pharisees, as exemplified in Alms-giving, Prayer, and Fasting ; 2. The Personal Life of the Pharisees ; and, 3. The Social Life of the Pharisees. The practical application or peroration of the sermon, which extends from chap. vii. 12, to the end, is directed to two points:—1. The Necessity of Striving to Enter into the Kingdom of Christ ; and, 2. The Necessity of Laying the Foundation of our Hopes and Happiness in Christ Himself.

Such, after a careful and minute consideration of the whole matter, in a simple dependence upon the Spirit of God, do we conceive to be the plan or scheme of this admirable sermon, designed to unfold, in the view of the world, the real nature of that kingdom which Christ had come to set up in the earth. On carefully comparing the sermon as given by Matthew, with the parallel passage in Luke, we are forced to the conclusion, that the former Evangelist, as addressing his gospel to his Jewish countrymen, has given the sermon in full, for the purpose of exhibiting

a view of the Christian dispensation in marked contrast to the perversions of the Scribes and Pharisees. The passages in Luke, on the contrary, appear to be mere repetitions of some portions of the sermon, which our blessed Lord gave at an after period of His public ministry.



INTRODUCTORY PORTION.



INTRODUCTORY PORTION.

CHAPTER I.

SECTION I.—CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS OF BELIEVERS UNDER THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION.

MAT. V. 1-5.

THE Evangelists appear to agree in the statement, that Jesus commenced His public ministry, not in Judea, where John preached, and where He himself was baptised, but in Galilee; and yet, although in the first instance His ministrations were confined to that remote district of Palestine, His fame was speedily diffused throughout all Syria, and multitudes from every quarter of the country, and even from the neighbouring nations, flocked to hear His wonderful words, and to witness His wonderful works. How varied must have been the motives which actuated

the motley mass that on these occasions composed the audience which Jesus addressed ! and how must the heart of Him who searcheth Jerusalem as with candles, have been saddened, as He beheld the thoughts, and feelings, and affections of each individual in the crowd before Him.

V. 1. "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain ; and when he was set, his disciples came unto Him." To a reflective Christian mind, there is something deeply solemn in the sight of a multitude assembled to hear the message of eternal life. Men and women of all classes, of all ages, of all characters, are crowded together in one dense mass. Their object seems to be one, but their motives, their feelings, their end, are widely different. To some, but, O, how few ! the truth will prove the savour of life unto life ; while to many, alas, how many ! it will prove the savour of death unto death. We may reflect upon the possibility of this : Jesus knows the reality. He *sees* the multitudes as no other on earth can see them. He searches each heart, and, as they crowd to hear Him, unconscious of His matchless glory, He knows the events of the past history of every individual before Him ; He witnesses their present spiritual state in the sight of a holy Jehovah ; and He is minutely acquainted with their future destiny.

When Jesus saw the multitudes " He went up into

a mountain," with no other view, probably, than that the multitudes might the more easily and comfortably hear him. We are not informed on what precise mountain the Redeemer spoke this wonderful sermon, and the only approach to certainty which we can make in speaking on the subject, is to refer it to some mountain or hill on the coast of the sea of Galilee.

On this mountain or hill, we are informed Jesus *sat*, this being the usual position of Jewish teachers when engaged in instructing the people, who generally stood in the form of a half circle before them. Accordingly, when "Jesus was set, his disciples came unto him," plainly perceiving from the attitude which he assumed, that he was about to address the multitudes. By the word "disciples" here, we must understand, not the twelve apostles, who had not yet been chosen, but all who had hitherto listened to his instructions, and been led by the grace of God to embrace His doctrines. They came to Him, anxiously desiring to learn the way of God more perfectly.

V. 2. "And He opened His mouth and taught them." This expression is evidently borrowed from the Hebrew. Thus, in Ps. lxxviii. 2, we find David saying, "I will open my mouth in parables." And the Evangelist in using it here, seems to refer to the solemnity, the pointedness, and impressiveness of the speaker's manner. "He spake as one having autho-

rity, and not as the scribes." He was evidently a teacher come from God, and though clothed in the garb and speaking the language of man, He was no other than the Son of God Himself. And in the presence of such a speaker must not every eye have been intently fixed, and every mind deeply solemnized. He is giving forth the words of grace and truth; He is revealing the counsels of heaven to fallen man, and as the accents of mercy and peace flow from His lips, let every soul be hushed into solemn stillness, and "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

V. 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," says this heavenly teacher, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The true source of happiness, or the chief good of man, has been a subject which, in all ages, has occupied the anxious attention of the wise and learned. From the writings both of ancient and modern philosophers we learn that many different opinions have been entertained upon the subject. Jesus, however, in the outset of this discourse, lays down eight different qualities or features of character, which infallibly lead to the lasting happiness of the soul. The man who is possessed of these qualities is blessed in time, and destined to be blessed throughout eternity.

Before considering this portion of our Lord's sermon, which is usually termed the Beatitudes, we remark generally, that on the great subject of the true

happiness of man, Christ and the world are completely at variance. In the opinion of the world the happiness of man is derived from objects *without* him ; in the opinion of Christ it is derived from the dispositions *within* him. Keeping this essential difference in view, it is well worth noticing that Jesus, in speaking here of the elements which compose true happiness, says not a word concerning those objects which men regard as chiefly contributing to their happiness, such as the possession of wealth, the indulgence of appetite, exemption from trouble, and the applause of our fellow men. These he not only does not include, but he purposely excludes from the list of true lasting blessings. If we would find true happiness, we must seek it not in the outward condition of a man, however prosperous, but in the inward state of a ransomed, accepted, sanctified child of God. To the different elements which compose the character of the truly happy man, let us now proceed, under the guidance of Him who spake as never man spake.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” From what we have already said it must be plain, that in these words Jesus does not refer to the outward condition of a man. It is altogether an error, to suppose that either poverty or riches is essential to true happiness. No. “A man’s life,” or real enjoyment, “consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” He may at one and the same time be poor and profligate.

gate; he may be rich and wretched. If, then, we would think of our outward condition at all, in its bearing upon our happiness, our safety lies in adopting the prayer of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me."

By the poor in spirit, whom our Lord pronounces blessed, we must understand those who are humbled before God under a sense of their own insignificance, and utter vileness; who are lying low at the divine footstool in quiet submission, being of a lowly and a contrite heart, and trembling at his word; who are feeling themselves to be wretched, and poor, and miserable, and who are, therefore, calmly receiving every thing from the hand of God, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Such was the spirit of David when he penned the Ps. cxxxi. "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty! neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." Such a man is truly blessed or happy. Sensible how little he deserves at the hand of God, he is thankful for what he is permitted to enjoy. He expects no great satisfaction in earthly things, and therefore he cannot be seriously disappointed. His temporal wants bear lightly upon his heart, compared with his spiritual necessities. He is poor in spirit. He feels his need of that gold tried in

the fire, by which alone he can be made rich. To the inexhaustible treasury of Christ's fulness, therefore, he is incessantly repairing, and seeking to obtain those supplies of grace which Christ alone can give. Pardon, peace, purity, life everlasting, are the chief objects of his desire. These are to him the true riches. If poor, he is contented, peaceful, and resigned; if rich in this world's goods, he is poor in spirit. The elements of real enjoyment are in that man's heart. "Peace is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

But not only are the poor in spirit happy in this world, we are told on the highest authority that they are truly blessed, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There is evidently a beautiful harmony between the character here described and the nature of the blessedness which the Redeemer promises to its possessor. They are poor in spirit, but theirs is a rich inheritance in the heavens. "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." Some have supposed that the expression "the kingdom of heaven," simply refers to the blessings of the gospel dispensation, which the Messiah introduced. But when we look at the rest of the beatitudes, and more especially at that which occurs in the 8th verse, where we find the promise, "they shall see God," we cannot refrain from interpreting the words in a far more exalted sense, as implying

that they are subjects of the kingdom of grace on earth, and shall enter the kingdom of glory in heaven. This shall form the consummation of their happiness. "He raiseth the poor from the dunghill, and causeth him to sit among princes." Often did the humble believer sit like another Lazarus at the master's gate, feeling that he was a worthless beggar, all covered over with sores, and gladly did he feed upon the crumbs that fell from his master's table, but now the beggar has become a king. The royal diadem sparkles on his brow. He is clothed in the royal robe; the sceptre of a monarch is in his hand; and lo! he sits beside the Son of God, himself a king and priest for ever. Truly "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

V. 4. "Blessed," adds the Redeemer, "are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." This description, "they that mourn," appears at first sight to include a far more extensive class of persons than that which we have just considered. All men indeed may be said to mourn. We live in a valley of tears, and so necessarily connected is distress of one kind or another with our fallen nature, that Scripture declares, and all experience confirms the truth of the declaration—"Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." In the humble cottage and in the splendid palace the garb of the mourner may be

seen, the cry of the mourner may be heard. Does this promise then include the whole mourning family of man? Has Jesus given forth the glorious announcement that all men shall be comforted? Ah! no. The wise man hath indeed told us that "sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." But all sorrow is not necessarily of benefit to the soul. We are taught by the Spirit of God that there is "a sorrow of the world which worketh death."

If then we would explain the passage in perfect consistency with the other statements of the Word of God, we must limit the promise of blessedness to mourners of a peculiar description, those whom the apostle describes as "mourning after a godly sort," not on account of distress merely, however painful and aggravated that distress may be, but on account of the great source of all distress, Sin. Mourners of this description look beyond all the evils of this life, and trace them back to their origin. In Adam all have sinned, and therefore in Adam all have died, and become subject to those numberless diseases and disasters and calamities of every kind which terminate at last in death. When a man, therefore, is led by the Spirit of God to look upon all the ills that befall him and his fellow men as the consequences of sin; when he views every pain that torments his body, and every anxiety that disquiets his soul, as having its origin in

sin, his is a hallowed, a blessed mourning. He is weeping, but they are the tears of an humble penitent; he has found trouble and sorrow, but God will speedily deliver his soul. "For," says Jesus, "he shall be comforted." In the very brokenness of heart, which he has begun to feel, there is a sweet consolation, for with such a sacrifice God is well pleased. And that subduedness of spirit shews that the heart is opening to drink in the dews of heavenly comfort. Jesus is at hand. These tears are bathing his feet, and ere long the refreshing words will be heard issuing from his lips, "be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." Then will the promise be fulfilled, "they shall be comforted." The peace of God that passeth all understanding will shed its delightful calm over the once troubled spirit; and now the believer, rescued from the deep pit and from the miry clay, will be able to sing with sweet satisfaction of spirit, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the light of the living."

But it is in heaven that this promise will meet with its complete accomplishment. Thither "the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." "They who

sow in tears shall then reap in joy. They who go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall then return rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them." The days of thy mourning, weeping believer, shall then be ended. Every tear shall be wiped from thine eye, and the full flowing river of heavenly consolation shall gladden thy soul throughout a blessed eternity.

V. 5. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." There is no feature of character which is less appreciated in our fallen world than that to which the Saviour here refers. In reference to this, as we have found to be the case with the others of which we have already spoken, there is a complete opposition between the mind of God and the mind of man. The peaceful, quiet, gentle, inoffensive person is usually despised by the indiscriminating mass, and yet the Spirit hath said expressly that "in the sight of God the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price." And this is the quality in His own character to which above all others the Redeemer would point His disciples: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls." The worldly man is restless, eager, ambitious, passionate and proud. He is jealous of any encroachments on his rights, and he seeks only the honour that cometh from man. But "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Their

minds are habitually calm, peaceful, and contented with their lot. They receive the gifts of God with humble, thankful hearts, and to the trials of life they submit with calm composure of spirit, saying, "We have received good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" And whence this calmness of soul? They have found rest in Christ, and being at peace with God they have obtained peace of conscience, and peace with all mankind. Such are the meek, and the promise of Christ in reference to them is, "they shall inherit the earth." This expression occurs in the xxxvii. Psalm; "For evil-doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth;" and again, "such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth." It probably implies that they shall possess all temporal blessings, all the good things of this life; "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." A promise of this nature is quite in accordance with the character and disposition of the meek. They are fitted to enjoy the gifts of providence with more relish than others from the serenity and composure of their minds; and while the worldling is easily fretted, irritated, and annoyed with every cross incident that occurs, the meek derives his happiness from a source which no earthly trouble can tarnish or impair. He has set his affections on the things that are above, and, therefore, he is all the better prepared to enjoy

with moderation the earthly blessings which he is permitted to receive. "He uses this world as not abusing it; knowing that the fashion of this world passeth away." Possessed of such a frame of mind it may well be said of all such, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The three features of character which we have now considered as being pronounced blessed by the Lord Jesus, are beautifully blended in every true child of God. He is poor in spirit, deeply conscious of his guilt and unworthiness, and, therefore, he mourns and bewails his condition in the sight of God, and he gradually imbibes a meek, gentle, subdued frame of mind. And each and all of these dispositions is essential to true happiness, not in the estimation of ignorant, erring man, but of Him who judgeth righteous judgment.

Are you then, reader, possessed of the dispositions which the Saviour pronounces blessed? Are you poor in spirit, feeling that you are only a poor petitioner at mercy's door with the plea of utter destitution? Have the tears of a true repentance begun to flow from your eyes, and is that proud, unsanctified heart now brought low? In such a case you are truly blessed, for the life of God has commenced in your soul, and He who hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward, and perfect it in the day of Jesus Christ. Cherish, we beseech you, the feelings

of the lowly penitent. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and in due time you shall be exalted, for "God giveth grace unto the humble, but the proud he knoweth afar off." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." Remember, thou humble, weeping believer, Christ hath pronounced thee blessed, and the blessings which he promises he is able and ready to bestow. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

But what shall be said to those, and they are a numerous class, who know no other happiness save that which earth can give? How long will you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? You mistake the shadow for the substance. Ask the man who has drunk the most largely of the delusive pleasures of this world, and he will tell you, from bitter experience, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

"Lean not on earth, 'twill pierce thee to the heart,
A broken reed at best; perchance a spear."

Has not the Son of God, who knoweth all things, been reminding you in this passage of a happiness greater, purer, more lasting than aught that this world can bestow? "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." Cease then from following a de-

lusive phantom, which if thou attempt to seize it will elude thy grasp; and while it would seem to light thy path, will lure thee on to eternal ruin. Listen to the voice of one who is Himself the way, and the truth, and the life. "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me; hear and your souls shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

SECTION II.—CHARACTER AND HAPPINESS OF BELIEVERS
UNDER THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION. (CONCLUDED.)

MAT. V. 6-12.

THERE is something deeply interesting in listening to the voice of Jesus on a question so important as that which regards the true happiness of the soul. He is speaking in the presence of a mixed multitude, composed chiefly of Jews, whose religious opinions had been derived not from the pure unerring statements of the Word of God, but from the vain traditions of the elders. It is remarkable how beautifully the Redeemer accommodates His discourse to His audience. It would have been premature to have made a full and explicit

revelation of the peculiar doctrines of the Christian dispensation. In describing, therefore, the man who is truly happy, blessed in time, and through eternity He exhibits the most striking and prominent features of his character, rather than the principles by which that character is formed. He gives a faithful portrait of the happy man, rather than an abstract dissertation on the nature and foundation of true happiness.

And the features of character which He selects are those which belong exclusively and alone to the true believer. The picture could not fail to be recognised as being altogether unlike even the happiest worldling. There is no mention whatever of riches, honour, pleasure—the chief ingredients of this world's enjoyments. And yet the absence of these renders the description all the more faithful and accurate. Our attention is called away from the world without us to the world within us, from outward and adventitious circumstances to the dispositions and affections of the soul. The man who is blessed, says the Lord Jesus, is poor in spirit, a mourner and meek; all of which qualities lie at the root of the Christian character. They are essential to the very existence of the life of God in the soul.

And as intimately connected with these the Saviour adds—

V. 6. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst

after righteousness ; for they shall be filled." The word "righteousness" is used in Scripture in a variety of senses. Sometimes it denotes justification or acceptance with God, as in the passage, among many others, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." In other passages it implies the ground of a believer's justification, the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus ; and, at other times, it denotes the inherent righteousness of the believer, or his practical conformity to the will of God. Now, in considering the precise meaning of the word in the passage before us, it is of importance to remark, that all the three significations to which we have adverted may be considered as merging into one. There is no righteousness which God can accept or recognise as entitled to the name, unless it be a righteousness which yields a perfect conformity to His will and law. This, of course, can only be declared with truth concerning the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. True, there is a partial conformity to the law of God, which every believer, by the indwelling operation of the Spirit, is enabled to attain ; but even this, imperfect though it be, is entirely dependent upon the previous imputation of Christ's righteousness to the soul. In other words, there is no inherent, without a previously imputed righteousness. The two are inseparable ; and when our Lord therefore speaks of a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, it is comparatively of little consequence

whether you understand the word to mean the one righteousness or the other. The soul that is deeply impressed with its own want of conformity to the law of a holy Jehovah, will mourn deeply over its state, and feel itself to be poor indeed; and having been awakened to a view of the excellence, and spirituality, and extent of God's holy, just, and good law, it will hunger and thirst after the attainment of such a conformity as is essential to its acceptance and happiness. The man becomes affectingly sensible of his need of this conformity; he therefore craves it with all the eagerness with which we seek to gratify our most urgent appetites. He will resort to every possible means by which he can attain this most desirable object. No sooner was the poor prodigal reduced to the lowest state, so that he would fain eat of the husks which the swine did eat, but no man gave unto him, than he came to himself, and said, "How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father." He straightway returns to his home; behold him once more under his father's roof, and listen to the voice of the tender and still affectionate parent—"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." "And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." He has not hungered and thirsted in vain.

“My soul breaketh,” says the Psalmist, “for the longing that it hath unto thy commandments.” The believer longs to be holy; and before he can be made righteous and holy, the righteousness of God must be brought near to him; that righteousness which renders the believer so pure in the eyes of Jesus, that, on beholding Him thus arrayed, He declares, “There is no spot in thee.” Blessed, says Christ, is the soul that desires to be thus legally and actually holy, for its desires shall be satisfied: they are such as God approves, and they convey unspeakable satisfaction to the human heart. The appetites of hunger and thirst are strong and pressing: to gratify these a man will surmount many an obstacle, and encounter many a risk. Even the natural affection of a mother for the babe which hangs upon her breast has been known to yield to the demands of dire and pressing necessity, and she has been known, under the influence of hunger,—as is said to have happened at the siege of Jerusalem,—to kill and eat her own child. And what fearful hazards have not men encountered to gratify their desire for water to quench their thirst! Such is the ardent longing of the convicted soul for a justifying righteousness; such the ardent longing of a converted soul for a growing conformity to the will of a now reconciled Father. The comparison which our Lord here institutes between the desires of the believer after righteous-

ness, and the natural appetites of man, explains to us the very strong language of David, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" And, in harmony with such feelings, our blessed Lord declares, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

That such desires will be gratified, we are informed by our blessed Lord. They have been excited by the Spirit of God, and the feelings which He awakens shall assuredly be satisfied. God never said to the seed of Jacob "seek ye my face in vain." "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." They shall be clothed in the spotless robe of the Redeemer's righteousness. The Spirit shall work in them both to will and to do of His own good pleasure; and they shall be privileged to dwell in those blessed mansions where "the people are all righteous."

V. 7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The features of character which our Lord has hitherto been pointing out to us respect the state of the soul, in reference to its actual condition in the sight of a holy God. But although the feelings which the contemplation of our state before God excites are such as belong to every true Christian, yet

the mere exhibition of such feelings would not present a faithful and accurate portrait of the true believer. He has feelings towards man, as well as feelings towards God. Both together go to form his real character. He is poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek and subdued in heart, and longing after conformity to the will of God. But he is also merciful, tender-hearted, compassionate to his fellow-men. That the cultivation of such a disposition is incumbent on every soul that is forgiven of God, is beautifully taught us in the parable of the king who would take account of his servants, Matt. xviii. 23, to the end. O surely if we forgive not others their trespasses, neither will our heavenly Father forgive our trespasses ; but there is no better evidence that we have been forgiven of God than the exercise habitually of a kind, merciful, and forgiving spirit towards our fellow-men. Their endeavours to injure us may be as incessant as they are unkind, but still it is our duty to forgive them, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven. It is said of God, that He delighteth in mercy ; and if we have experienced that mercy, we will be touched with compassion for the distresses of our fellow-men. It will be our desire to shew kindness to all around us, and to "weep with them that weep."

Such persons are truly "blessed." There is a happiness in the indulgence of kind and affectionate dispositions, to which the unmerciful are utter stran-

gers. But we must beware of confounding the character, which is here described, with that of the constitutionally amiable man, who, endowed with a naturally tender heart, delights in deeds of benevolence from no higher principle than merely to gratify his natural feelings. The merciful man whom our Lord pronounces blessed, has found mercy of God, and since he has been forgiven of God he is of a forgiving spirit. And while this change in his character shews that he has felt in his own experience that God is merciful, it is also a token and a pledge that on a future day he shall obtain mercy. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor. The Lord will make all his bed in his trouble." The mode in which God deals with men is often in beautiful harmony with the mode in which they have acted towards Him. He often causes their sin both in its existence and its peculiar nature, to be written in their punishment. And the way also in which He shews His approval of His people's conduct is often similar to that in which they sought to approve themselves to him. Nor is this a mere opinion of man ; it is a doctrine of the Word of God. Thus David speaks of the dealings of God in Psalm xviii. 25 and 26. "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful ; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright ; With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure ; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward."

The promise to the merciful, then, must be viewed in its most extended sense, as pointing to God's dealings with His people, both here and hereafter. " Goodness and mercy shall follow them all the days of their life, and they shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." They have shewn themselves merciful to others, and they shall not want a comforter in their day of sorrow. They shall have the God of Jacob for their refuge, and underneath them shall be the everlasting arms. And at last when multitudes of poor Christless sinners shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, they shall obtain mercy, and abundant entrance shall be ministered unto them into the kingdom of their Father.

V. 8. " Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." All true religion has its seat in the heart; and as out of the heart are the issues of life, the utmost importance is attached in the scriptures to the real state of the heart. In his natural condition, " the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." It is an impure fountain whence proceed all evil thoughts and ungodly actions. If the heart of man, then, be thus depraved, whence are we to obtain purity of heart? Only from the indwelling operation of the Holy Ghost. It is His province, and

His alone to cleanse and purify the soul. He begins and carries forward and perfects the work of grace in the soul. We cannot, by any effort, purify our own hearts. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, neither can he that is accustomed to do evil learn to do well." There must be an influence from above of such power as to change the whole current of our feelings, inclinations, and desires, otherwise the heart will retain its original impurity and opposition to God. But let the Spirit of God, who formerly brooded upon chaos, and then arose a bright and beautiful creation, descend upon our dark and dead souls; let Him put forth his new creating energy, and forthwith we shall become a new creation in Christ Jesus, where all that is pure, lovely, honourable, and of good report, will flourish and prevail. That purifying process will be begun, which will rapidly advance, so that our path will be like that of the just, which shineth more and more until the perfect day. We shall then be blessed even in this life, for though separated from the world the happiness which the pure in heart enjoy is greater far than that of the most prosperous worldlings; for "they shall see God." It is impossible with our bodily eye to behold God. In this sense "no man hath seen God at any time." But we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. What the bodily eye is

to the natural man, faith is to the spiritual man. It is the evidence, the proof, the realization of things not seen. By faith then the pure in heart contemplate the glories and excellencies of God in his revealed character, and in this they experience an exalted enjoyment. And the more they advance in purity of heart, the clearer, the brighter, their spiritual perception of God becomes, and the more is their true happiness increased. And when the veil shall have been removed which now obscures, in a great measure, the divine perfections, when instead of the scattered rays which are now reflected from the works of creation, providence and redemption, the full blaze of the divine glory shall have burst upon their view, O, how shall we describe their rapturous joy: it is then that they shall be truly "blessed," for in the most emphatic sense "they shall see God." Their communion with God on earth is necessarily partial, and the enjoyment derived from it consequently imperfect, but what they here see through a glass darkly they shall then see face to face. To see God is to enjoy him, and it is in heaven that He is pleased to manifest Himself in a peculiar manner, displaying the transcendent glories of His perfections.

But it is not only in the contemplation of the divine excellencies that the pure in heart shall be blessed, they shall also be like God, for they shall see Him as He is. If on earth they ardently desired and prayed

for conformity to the divine image, their desires shall then be fully satisfied, and their progress in holiness shall be uniform and uninterrupted. That burden of sin which often led them to go mourning all the day long, shall be for ever removed ; those tears with which they often watered their couch on account of their darkness, and deadness, and carnality of mind, shall be for ever wiped away ; the clouds of unbelief shall disperse before the rising glories of that eternal morning, their faith shall finally give place to vision, and their hope to complete and everlasting enjoyment.

V. 9. "Blessed are the peace-makers ; for they shall be called the children of God." This may be regarded as an exhibition of the effect of true religion upon the world at large. All human systems of morality have hitherto failed to operate a change upon the violent passions of man, and for this plain reason, that they have no tendency to subdue and sanctify the soul. "Whence come wars and fightings among you?" asks the apostle James, "come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members." The Christian, however, having become himself a partaker of that peace which passeth all understanding, follows habitually "those things that make for peace." He seeks to "follow peace with all men," as well as "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

He is emphatically a peace-maker who delights in using all means of promoting and preserving peace, and in endeavouring to put an end to those contentions and animosities that may prevail around him. Such men are blessed in their dispositions and blessed in their deeds. Peaceful, calm, and tranquil in their own minds, they are free from those turbulent passions which agitate and disturb the unsanctified breast. The wicked are said to be "like the troubled sea which casts up mire and dirt." But the child of God has sought to "put away all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," and to be "clothed with humility" and meekness, and every charitable feeling. Such a man is a blessing to the society in which he lives. On his honoured head many a blessing is implored and many a blessing falls, while the peace-breaker is accursed of God and abhorred by his fellow men. The peculiar blessing which Jesus pronounces upon peace-makers is, that "they shall be called the children of God," which is simply an expression taken from the Hebrew and denoting "they shall be the children of God." This glorious title is applied by the apostle Paul to believers thus,—“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” The peace-maker, however, is exhibiting in his character one of those peculiar qualities which shows him to be emphatically a child of Him who is the God of peace, and who, in the fulness

of time, proclaimed peace upon the earth and goodwill towards the children of men. In the peace-maker you may trace the image of "the Prince of peace," who hath "made peace by the blood of his cross." Even in this world he will be owned as a child of God enjoying the smile of his Father's love, and growing in his Father's likeness. But it is on the great day that he will be openly acknowledged to be a child, and, if a child, then an heir of God and joint-heir with Jesus Christ. The last beatitude is thus expressed :

Vv. 10, 11, and 12. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." In the description of the peace-maker we saw Jesus adverting to the sweetening influence of the Christian character upon society at large, and now we perceive him, in plain language, describing the treatment which the believer is doomed to experience from that very world which is blessed with his peaceful and benevolent efforts. He is destined to be "persecuted for righteousness sake." To experience hatred and persecution at the hands of our

fellow-men is not necessarily and by itself an evidence that we belong to the family of God. It is possible to suffer for evil-doing as much as for well-doing. And to this the apostle Peter alludes when he says, "For what glory is it if, when ye suffer for your *faults*, you take it patiently?" But the suffering to which our Lord refers is here said to be "for righteousness sake," that is, in consequence of our firm and determined adherence to the cause and the service of Christ. The ways in which the world manifests its opposition to the people of God are very different: and, accordingly, while the general word "persecute" is used in the 10th verse, we are informed, more particularly in the 11th verse, that they will "revile" them, and "speak all manner of evil against them falsely." These and many other kinds of persecution have been experienced by the followers of Christ in every age of the Church. The seed of the serpent has ever been bitterly opposed to the seed of the woman; and, accordingly, we find it laid down by an apostle as a general principle of God's government that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

And yet in the very same breath our Lord pronounces the believers thus persecuted to be truly blessed. They feel it to be a high privilege to suffer in such a cause, and hence the lonely dungeon resounds with their songs of praise. "I take pleasure,"

is an apostle enabled to say, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." The man who could utter language of such high Christian heroism cannot fail to be truly happy. "If his sufferings abound, his consolations in Christ much more abound." And how glorious the prospects of all such as are persecuted for righteousness sake: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The very sufferings which they endure upon the earth have a powerful influence in weaning their affections from earthly objects; and how will these sufferings enhance the blessedness of their Father's house! In proportion to the depth of their sorrow shall be the extent of their joy; in proportion to the intensity of their suffering shall be the glory of their reward; for "great," says Jesus, "is their reward in heaven." As they have suffered with Christ, so they shall reign with him. Well, then, may the persecuted Christian be called upon to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad." It is a high honour to be counted worthy to suffer in the cause of Christ. So has the world treated the prophets of God in all past ages. And not contented with killing the prophets, and stoning those that were sent to them, the world crucified the Son of God himself; and He hath taught his people that if they persecuted Him they will persecute them also. Blessed are all that believe on this precious Saviour, and doubly blessed are they to whom "it is

given not only to believe but also to suffer for His sake.”

Each of the beatitudes, standing as it were by itself, may be viewed as the representation of a believer under a peculiar aspect, and they may also be regarded as, when taken together, affording a complete, accurate, and faithful portrait of one who has been born from above, who has been effectually called out of nature's darkness into the light and life of the gospel. Such a man has, at one and the same moment, the whole of the eight special qualities or features of character which our Lord here describes. He is a man that is poor in spirit, for he has become deeply sensible of his own insignificance, weakness, and unworthiness before God ; he mourns on account of his sinfulness, for he sees that he is vile ; he is meek and subdued in spirit, for he has learned of Him that is meek and lowly, and he has found rest for his soul ; he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, for a complete conformity to the law of God is now the prevailing desire of his heart ; he is merciful, kind, and compassionate to his fellow-men, for he himself has found mercy of the Lord ; he is pure in heart, for he has been created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works ; he is a peace-maker, for he himself has become a partaker of that peace which passeth all understanding ; he is persecuted for righteousness sake, for though he is in the world he is no longer of the world,

and therefore the world hateth him. Such are the prominent features of the Christian's character, and they are the very elements which go to mark him out as a converted man. And further, they are essential points of his new nature. He not only *may* have them, but he *must* have them, otherwise he is not of God. He may be deficient in many other qualities, but he cannot want even one of these.

Another light in which the eight beatitudes may be regarded is, that they afford us a historical view of the growth of the Christian character from the hour when the babe in Christ draws the first breath of spiritual life, onward to that hour when he stands forth before the world, so strikingly reflecting the image of Christ that the world hates him as it hated his Lord. In this view poverty of spirit may be regarded as the commencing step of the work of grace in the soul, leading onward to mourning for sin, meekness and subduedness of heart, ardent longings after righteousness, and all the other steps which are here described. These beatitudes, then, represent the Christian character in the different stages of its formation, and as the entire plant in all its different parts may be considered as existing in the germ, so, although we have treated of each of these graces separately, the whole character may be considered as included in any one of them. It is true that one believer may excel in one feature of character and an-

other in another, still all believers will possess, to a certain extent, each of these graces for himself, and it will ever be his earnest prayer and endeavour that “he may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

And besides, our blessed Redeemer has taught us that the possession of this character in all its parts is the only way to the attainment of true happiness. The long disputed point, therefore, as to the chief good of men, is settled by Christ in these verses. It is no longer a matter of doubt or of discussion who is the man that is truly, substantially, and permanently happy. No other is truly happy except the man that is humble and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at the word of God. Away, then, with those delusions with which the world has so long been blinded. It is absolutely needful, while we are in the world, that we labour for the meat which perisheth that we may provide things honest in the sight of all men ; but, ah ! it is infinitely more necessary that we labour for that meat which endureth to everlasting life, and without which our souls must perish for ever. As much as infinity exceeds an inch of space, or eternity a moment of time, so much do the concerns of the soul exceed in interest and importance the concerns of these frail, dying bodies. Let our affections rise, then, to the things which are above ; let our souls seek their happiness in God only, and then shall we

meet all the goods and the ills of this life with that moderation and contentment, and calm submission, which betoken a heart weaned from the world, elevated in affection and desire to the things that are above, and having its everlasting home in the heavens.

CHAPTER II.

INFLUENCE OF THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION UPON THE WORLD.

MAT. V. 13-16.

WHILE the Redeemer would inculcate upon His people, in this Introductory Part of His Discourse, the indispensable necessity of being clothed with the essential graces of the Christian character, He reminds them also of the high, the honourable, the responsible situation which they hold in the world. Of them it is emphatically true, that "no man liveth to himself; no man dieth to himself; but whether they live, they live unto the Lord, and whether they die, they die unto the Lord, so that living or dying they are the Lord's." And if a regard to His honour is to be the mainspring of all their movements, they must never forget that they are His special messengers to warn, reprove, and instruct a world lying in the wicked One—a doctrine which is plainly taught in that impressive passage of our Lord's intercessory prayer: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Think of this solemn announcement, believer! ponder deeply

the responsibilities of thy position. Listen then to the words of thy Lord:—

V. 13. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” Salt is often spoken of in sacred Scripture. Thus, in the law of the meat-offering, these words occur, Lev. ii. 13, “And every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.” From the peculiar strength of these words, it is plain that the utmost importance was attached by God to the use of salt in the meat-offering; and, indeed, the expression, “the salt of the covenant of thy God,” shows that it was absolutely indispensable to the establishment of the covenant. Hence, every covenant which was ratified in this way received the name of a covenant of salt. Thus, in 2 Chron. xiii. 5, we find it thus written, “Ought ye not to know, that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, *even* to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?” It is plain, therefore, that it was salt which was regarded as seasoning the sacrifice, and giving it a relish before God.

And in this view of the expression, the meaning of

the passage before us is plain. The world is viewed as, in the estimation of God, a tasteless, insipid mass, having no relish with Him, except from the presence of His own children. It is for the elect's sake that all the common benefits and blessings of Providence are received by the world. The offering is presented before Him, but it is only the salt which gives it a relish. What restrains these fiery clouds from discharging fire and brimstone upon the abandoned cities of the plain? It is because the righteous Lot is there. The wicked owe their worldly comforts to these very men whom they hate and persecute. The Lord dealt kindly with the house of Pharaoh for Joseph's sake. But there is still another kindred aspect in which the figure of salt may be viewed as applicable to the true believer. When salt is used, in Old Testament times, in the formation of a covenant, its presence seems to have imparted perpetuity to the covenant, which is accordingly termed, "a covenant of salt for ever." This notion is in harmony with the well-known use of salt in preserving substances from passing into corruption. And are not believers, in this sense, also well entitled to be called "the salt of the earth?" The whole world is lying under the sentence of a righteous God; and what restrains Him from hurling forth the thunderbolts of His holy indignation, and executing the fierceness of His anger in a moment? It is because men of whom the world is

not worthy are treading its polluted soil. Let the elect be once gathered in from the four winds of heaven, and judgment will come forth to do its work.

If ye then, believers, be the salt of the earth; if it be your presence,—as a holy nation, a peculiar people,—that gives Jehovah any pleasure in looking down upon the world He has formed, and restrains Him from pouring forth His merited indignation, O, how solemn, how responsible your position! Be not high-minded, but fear; for “if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” Such was the case with the Jewish people: they were the chosen, favoured people of God. “Israel is my son, even my first-born.” But in process of time “the salt lost his savour:” the Israelitish nation had “been planted a noble vine; wholly a right seed; but they became the degenerate plant of a strange vine.”—“He had nourished and brought them up as children, but they rebelled against Him.” And in such melancholy circumstances as these, can we wonder that at last the long-suffering patience of Jehovah came to an end; Jerusalem was trodden down of the Gentiles, and Israel cast out from the favour of his God.

Such, indeed, is the mode in which God deals with His people in all generations. He regards them as the salt of the earth: for their sakes He blesses and

preserves the world. But if the salt loses its savour; if the child of God fails to exhibit in his whole deportment the sanctifying influences of the truth as it is in Jesus, then has he fallen from his high position, and incurred the displeasure of his God. It is no easy matter to be a Christian, or even a professing Christian. Solemn responsibilities are thereby incurred, not only in reference to our own souls, but to the unbelieving world around us.

Another figure which our Lord uses in reference to the same subject is contained in the

V. 14. "Ye are the light of the world." Christ himself is termed the Light of the World. "He was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." When believers, therefore, are described as the light of the world, it must be understood as implying that they shine, not by an original, but a borrowed light, reflecting the light of the Sun of Righteousness. Once the child of God was in darkness,—unrelieved by a single ray of heavenly light,—and in this state he would have for ever remained, had not "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in his heart, to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus." Now, therefore, "he is no longer darkness, but light in the Lord;" a light which has imparted to his soul a true spiritual

acquaintance with the truth of God, and which has so changed the whole current of his thoughts, and feelings, and affections, that they are brought, to a certain extent, into conformity with the truth of God. He has been "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord," and therefore he is gradually in course of being changed "into the same image, from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of the Lord."

Nor is this spiritual illumination of the soul intended for his own personal advantage alone. "He is no longer his own, but bought with a price." He is the servant of another, therefore, and bound by the most solemn obligations to fulfil the great commission with which he has been entrusted, to show forth the glory of Christ in the world. Hence our Lord adds to enforce this view of the matter, "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." Its very position exposes it to the constant inspection of man. Its beauties and its blemishes are alike patent to all. Such, so conspicuous, so incessantly under the notice of the world, is the true Christian. He is a city set on a hill, purposely exalted in the view of the whole world, not that men may point the finger of scorn, but that they may behold and admire the grace of God which is so manifest in them. "The Christian cannot be hid." All eyes are turned towards him, some from curiosity, some from intense and bitter hatred, waiting for his

halting; and others, that they may be guided and encouraged by his example in their journey heavenward. How careful, how circumspect ought a believer to be!

That much benefit to the souls of men is to be expected from the character and conduct of the believer, we may easily gather from the description given of him as a light. He is emphatically "a light shining in a dark place." And what is the ordinary procedure of men in the use of common light?

V. 15. Men "do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."

Even in the ordinary affairs of life, mankind are regulated by care and forethought. When they light a candle, they do not proceed straightway to cover it up, and thus defeat the very purpose for which it had been lighted; nay, they give it rather every facility for accomplishing its end, by placing it in a high position, that it may diffuse light all around. If Christians then be the light of the world, if they were so appointed by Christ himself, what is to be expected of them but that instead of shrinking from an open testimony for Christ and his cause in the world, they should come boldly and conspicuously forward "holding forth the Word of life, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." And, accordingly, Jesus

follows up his appeal with an express command to his people ;

V. 16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

From this passage it is plain, that when our Lord speaks of believers as the light of the world, he has specially in view the conduct and behaviour of his people. It is their good works that he is particularly desirous should be seen of men. It is not by a loud and empty profession of a sound and orthodox creed, but by shining as lights in the world, that we fulfil our vocation as children of God. "Who is a wise man, and endowed with knowledge? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." And this is one of the most effectual ways of silencing the infidel, and affording a practical argument in support of the truth of God. "So is the will of God, that by well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." "I have been able," said a young man who was in danger of falling into the snares of infidelity, "to get over many of the arguments brought forward in favour of Christianity, but there is one argument which I have never been able to withstand, and it is this, the godly, consistent life of my own father."

But observe what is the end for which Christ would

have his people to maintain in the world a holy walk and conversation. It is not that men may praise, and admire, and extol the beauty and brilliancy of that light which believers are manifesting in the midst of an ungodly generation. He wishes them to be seen, but their Father to be glorified. He will not allow us to forget, that if there be any light in us, it is borrowed and reflected, not inherent and direct. It has been obtained from the great source of light, and to Him therefore be the glory. "There is none truly good but one, that is God." From Him all goodness comes, to Him all goodness tends.

And, besides, to manifest the glory of God was the great end of all creation ; for "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." "The heavens declare His glory." "The whole earth is full of His glory." And when the grace and glory of God are manifested in his people, they are only acting in harmony with the whole creation. They are seeking to fulfil that which is the great end of their creation, and which is more especially the end of their new creation of God. For to this end have they been called, that they may be to the riches of the glory of His grace, that they may show forth the praises of Christ, that they themselves may glorify and lead others "to glorify their Father who is in heaven."

Such, believers, is your high and holy calling. You are pronounced by the mouth of Jesus Him-

self to be the salt of the earth, that which seasons it and preserves it from ruin. And yet you are warned that the salt may lose its savour, and thus become not only unfit for use but altogether worthless. Of all substances in nature salt is one of the most useful, and, therefore, most abundant in all parts of the earth. But when it loses its saltiness and becomes insipid, no substance is more completely useless. "It is fit neither for the land nor yet for the dunghill, but only to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." What a melancholy picture of the inconsistent Christian, the backslider and the apostate! Of the corrupt world there is hope that it may even yet be seasoned by the salt of the earth; but if they who were once fitted to season others shall themselves become corrupt, what hope is there of them? "What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have already done? Wherefore, then, when I come seeking grapes, does it bring forth wild grapes?" How melancholy the thought that they who ought to prove themselves the salt of the earth should, instead of preserving the world from destruction, hasten even by one hour the process of moral corruption, which will at length draw down the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men! Better were it, Christian, infinitely better, that the name of Jesus never escaped from your lips, than that you should exhibit to the

world a cold, heartless, inconsistent profession, which, instead of establishing, only unsettles the wavering, and instead of disarming, only confirms the unbeliever in his resistance to the gospel of Christ. You stand conspicuous in the world as having openly declared yourself on the Lord's side, and in every thing you are naturally expected to maintain a deportment in strict harmony with the principles you have professed. To your fellow-Christians you owe that love which is the invariable characteristic of those who have passed from death unto life; and to the unbelieving world around, you owe a decorous, and creditable, and consistent conduct. If you preserve not towards those who are "without" that strict integrity of character, and purity of intention, and singleness of heart which invariably command respect, you give occasion to the enemy to bring against you the charge of inconsistency, and even to blaspheme that holy name by the which you are called. If even the world's votaries, who scoff at religion, surpass you in the common virtues, and decencies, and charities of life, what are your boasted professions of religion but the whitened coating of the sepulchre, which within is full of rottenness and all uncleanness? Ah! it is impossible to describe the injury which hath been done in the world by inconsistent professors. How many weak Christians have, by their unhallowed influence, been made to stumble and fall! How many lukewarm

professors of the Christian faith have they tended, by their example, to lull into indifference and spiritual slumber! How many tears have they wrung from the eyes of the true followers of Jesus! What vigour have they imparted to the unholy purpose, what celerity to the melancholy progress of the sinner! Unjust in their dealings, false in their assertions, unfaithful to their engagements, slothful in their business, they disregard those pure and lofty motives which ought ever to actuate the believer in all the circumstances and relations of life! Well, therefore, may the arousing question be asked, "If the salt have lost its savour wherewith shall it be salted?" "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

And what does Christ here say of the ungodly world? It is an unsavoury, insipid mass, fast passing into complete corruption. It is covered with darkness gross and deep, so gross, so deep, that only the light of God can dispel it. But this light hath arisen, sinner, and there is healing in its beams. The Sun of Righteousness is shining as the great depository of spiritual light, and all believers are lesser luminaries reflecting the brightness of Christ's image all around them. And why is such a flood of light seen pouring upon this dark world? It is, that if possible light may enter thy dark soul. Come to the light, thou that art far from God, come to the light that thy

deeds may be reprov'd, and may He who said of old, "Let there be light and there was light," speak to thy heart with the same all-powerful efficacy, and in His light thou shalt see light.

CHAPTER III.

HARMONY OF THE GOSPEL AND JEWISH DISPENSATIONS.

MAT. V. 16-19.

At the time when our Lord appeared, although the Jews were reduced to the lowest state of moral degradation, they still preserved a remarkable zeal for the outward observance of the law of Moses. Nay they were taught by the Scribes to regard their strict adherence to the ceremonial institutions as the very foundation of their hope towards God, and as, indeed, the all in all of religion. With such perverted views sedulously inculcated by the Jewish teachers, and encouraged by the whole conduct and deportment of the Pharisees, we cannot wonder that the doctrines which our Lord taught must have appeared strange, and, indeed, opposed to all that His hearers had learned of the Word of God. The law, with its cumbrous ritual, seemed by the teaching of Christ to be entirely set at nought, and, instead of it, a spiritual system of

doctrine was substituted, which struck at the very root of that formality which, in their view, formed the very essence of religious character. If Jesus would speak of a truly good and a truly happy man, he describes him not as tithing mint and anise and cummin, as fasting with scrupulous exactness, and praying at the corners of the streets, that he might be seen of men. Such a description would have been completely in harmony with all the Jewish conceptions of the man on whose honoured head the approving smile of heaven would rest. The portrait, however, which Jesus draws, is one which they imagine must surely be the creation of his own fancy. An humble, meek, lowly, suffering, despised man—He pronounces such a one happy. So far is the Jew from entertaining any notions kindred to these, that he regards every instance of suffering as necessarily connected with personal sin, and it is long since he has learned to mistake and to misinterpret the language of the prophets, who speak of a lowly, suffering Messiah, and to expect instead of Him a powerful conqueror, a triumphant king.

Jesus knows what is passing in their minds. He sees that all He has said of the character and the responsibility of the true Christian has excited many a doubt whether He Himself was indeed the Messiah promised to the Fathers, whether one setting forth such claims would have spoken in such direct opposi-

tion to all that they believed the Word of God contained. The Saviour accordingly proceeds to rectify their opinions on this important subject, and to show them that so far from thinking or speaking lightly of the Old Testament scriptures, it was the express object and design of His coming to fulfil all that was written therein concerning Him.

V. 17. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." According to the Jews the writings of the Old Testament were usually divided into three portions, termed the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, or Poetical Books. Frequently, however, the whole are summed up in two portions, the Law and the Prophets. Here, however, it may be observed Jesus uses the expression the Law or the Prophets probably to meet the views of the different parties which formed His audience. Among them were Sadducees, who chiefly and almost exclusively venerated the Law of Moses, while Scribes and Pharisees also were there who regarded the Law and the Prophetical Books as possessed equally of Divine authority. To all who adhered, under whatever form, to the Jewish Scriptures, the remark of Jesus was addressed, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." He knew the inmost thoughts of His hearers. He saw the suspicion

rising in their minds that the doctrines to which they had been listening were opposed to all their views of the mind of God in His word ; and He declares to them that He had come on very purpose not to destroy but to fulfil. The law of God was hid within His heart. He had been "made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem us who were under the law." As God He was above all law, being Himself the righteous Lawgiver. But to accomplish His great work as mediator He became subject to that very Law which He himself had given, and yielding to it the perfect obedience of the God-man, Christ Jesus, He magnified the Law, and made it honourable. Thus by His obedience unto the death He became the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The demands of the Law were fully satisfied, and the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in all his people.

And not only did Jesus come to fulfil the Law, but the Prophets also. The Old Testament is one entire prophecy of Christ, and, therefore, if our Lord would recommend to the Jews to search their own Scriptures, the argument which He urges upon them is that they testify of Him. The law of Moses itself, with all its ceremonial institutions, was simply a shadow of good things to come. It involved, no doubt, a charge of sin addressed to all who engaged in its observances ; but with no other view than that those who were un-

der it might be shut up unto the faith of the Gospel. It involved, no doubt, in its numerous sacrifices the notion of atonement, but with no other view than to direct the eye of faith to that sacrifice which was ordained to be offered up on Calvary, and which was alone available as an atonement for sin. It involved, no doubt, the idea of cleansing, but only as prefiguring the work of the Holy Spirit, whose agency, with all its blessed effects, constitutes the peculiar glory of the Gospel dispensation. In this aspect, therefore, the Jewish economy may be viewed as one grand type, emblem, prophecy of Christ. And not only in figure, but in plain language does the Old Testament speak of Christ. A series of prophecies extending over the whole line of ancient history, from the fall of man to the coming of the Messiah, affords a striking and impressive testimony to the truth of the assertion, "I came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfil." All that was written concerning Christ hath been fully accomplished, and every word that God hath spoken shall assuredly come to pass. Jesus accordingly adds :—

V. 18. "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

The Redeemer, in using at the commencement of this verse an expression which is equivalent to an

oath, is evidently desirous of impressing upon His hearers the solemn assurance that the law of God is, and must be of perpetual obligation. The word of God abideth for ever : It is like Himself, unchangeable and eternal. His works are destined to exist only for a time. “The heavens and the earth shall pass away.” “The heavens shall pass away like a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,” but not the smallest, and apparently most unimportant statement that comes from the mouth of God shall fail of its entire accomplishment. The expression which our Lord here uses is strong. “One jot,” the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, or “one tittle,” the smallest dash of the pen intended to distinguish letters that are nearly alike, shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. The law of God shall be fulfilled, for it is a transcript of Himself. It must be eternally and unchangeably binding on every intelligent creature whom God hath made. It asserts its claims either to obedience or to punishment with unflinching strictness, and though, to the believer, it has ceased to be a covenant of works on the ground of which he can expect to enter into life, it still remains in all its original integrity as a rule of life. In no way can it be relaxed in its obligations or mitigated in its demands. And hence our Lord declares,—

V. 19. “Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of

these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

In these words our blessed Lord, though using a general statement, has obviously a reference to the conduct and the instructions of the Scribes and Pharisees. They attempted, like the Romanists of modern times, to establish a distinction among the precepts of the law, alleging some to be of greater and some of less importance. But Jesus vindicates the law from all such unwarranted distinctions, plainly teaching that whosoever is guilty of transgressing in his own person or encouraging others to transgress any one of these commandments, would be accounted least in the kingdom of God, that is, he would be unworthy of a place in the Church of God, and would be thrust out from it as a corrupt and unworthy member. But, on the other hand, the man who shall seek faithfully to observe the holy law of God, and to promote its observance among all within the sphere of his influence, such a man shall obtain favour of the Lord, and shall occupy an exalted place in the kingdom of his Father. He has turned many to righteousness, and, therefore, he shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

The law of God, the holy Jesus maintains, is the highest object of the believer's regard. “O how love I thy law,” is the exclamation of the true child of

God, "it is my meditation all the day;" and such is the jealousy which he feels for the honour of God and of his law, that his eyes run down with tears because men keep not that law. The believer is an unwearied apostle of the law. He teaches it by his lips and by his life, and, instead of wishing, in the slightest degree to lower the standard of Jehovah's law, he holds forth the very fulfilment of it in the cross of Christ as the most powerful evidence that it is unchangeably holy, inflexibly just, and inexpressibly good. No doubt he has learned that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified, and, therefore, he rejoices that he is no longer under the law, but under grace. And yet the very thought of losing sight of the law of God he repels with the utmost indignation. "Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yea we establish the law." Entertaining such views of the law of God he enjoys true spiritual peace, for "great peace have they who love thy law, nothing shall offend them." Such persons "delight in the law of God after the inward man;" and though they often feel to their sad experience that they have "a law in their members warring against the law of their minds" they long for complete deliverance from the dominion of sin, that they may be holy as God is holy. It is this admiration and love of God's law, this growing desire after conformity to its pure and righteous

precepts which constitutes the very essence of religion in the soul. There may be an appearance of sanctity in the outward demeanour, but it is the prevailing influence and power of God's law in the heart which alone entitles a man to the appellation of a true Christian.

SUBJECT OF SERMON.

MAT. V. 20.

IN the peculiar circumstances in which the Sermon on the Mount was delivered, Jesus deemed it right to approach the chief subject of His sermon with great caution, preparing the minds of His hearers by such an exhibition of the principles of the Gospel scheme as would most effectually divest their minds of prejudice. The subject was new and alien from their ordinary modes of thinking. And, besides, the manner in which it was expounded by Christ was so very different from the teaching of the Scribes, that they were in danger of conceiving of Christ's doctrines as opposed to those of Moses. But He shows that His principles were the very principles of the Jewish law in its true sense. It was not He that was in error, but the Scribes and Pharisees, and that not on an unimportant but a vital point. They had perverted the great principle on which depended man's present happiness and eternal bliss, and, therefore, Jesus plainly and openly declares :—

V. 20. "I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes

and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

The Scribes and Pharisees were the persons whose influence over their Jewish brethren was the greatest. The Scribes were the literary men of their time, who sat in Moses' seat, and interpreted the law according to their own erroneous opinions. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were held in the highest esteem, not only for the doctrines which they taught, but for the marked sanctity of their outward deportment. They made clean the outside of the cup and the platter. None more scrupulous than they in the observance of mere outward forms, while they were all the while utter strangers to that truth and purity in the inward parts which the law of God imperatively requires. Against such formalists and hypocrites the Faithful and True Witness pronounces the most solemn condemnation, and He warns all His followers that unless they should attain a better, a purer righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees, with all their boasted purity, had attained, they could in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. The word *righteousness* here is plainly to be understood both as denoting that justifying righteousness which forms the ground of our acceptance before God, and that holiness of heart and life which is indispensable as a preparation for the everlasting enjoyment of God. Both in the matter of justification and sanctification, our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of

the Scribes and Pharisees. If we would enter the kingdom of heaven we must excel even these men who stood the highest in the estimation of their Jewish countrymen.

The attainment of a righteousness so pure, so complete as to meet the demands of the law and the justice of God, has, since the fall, been the grand object after which man has been constantly aspiring. His language has ever been "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The law of God demands a perfect obedience ere we can either find acceptance with God or be fitted to dwell for ever in His presence. As long as the infinitely great, and holy, and just God exists or wields the sceptre of the universe, this law must ever retain its original purity, unsullied as the Lawgiver Himself. When, therefore, man had trampled under foot those righteous statutes which bound in holy and harmonious subjection the whole intelligent creation to its God; there remained only a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which certainly awaited him as an adversary of God. Before a reconciliation could be effected between rebellious man and his justly offended

Creator, it was necessary not only that an atonement of infinite value should be made for sin, but that the whole law should be obeyed, and the injury and dishonour which had been done by sin to the character of God and the rectitude of his government should be repaired. These righteous requirements no human being, no angel, nay not even the highest archangel, could possibly satisfy. But the Son of God in His infinite mercy presented Himself as the surety of His people, consenting to obey in its fullest extent the law which they had broken, and to suffer in all its unmitigated severity the punishment which they deserved. He became, in short, "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

The necessity of such a righteousness as that which Christ hath brought in to our acceptance with God, and our entrance into heaven, Jesus Christ points out, not directly, but by implication, in the Sermon on the Mount. When man was originally created in the image of God the law was sufficient of itself to impart to him a justifying righteousness; and even now, "if there had been a law which could have given righteousness, verily righteousness would have been by the law." But a broken law never can be available for this end. On the contrary, from the very moment that it was transgressed all who were under it were necessarily under a curse, and by the deeds of that law no man could henceforth be justified. Righteousness, therefore,

must be sought from some other source. Jesus, blessed be His name, hath provided the needful righteousness ; and now we are justified by “ the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.”

The revelation of this perfect, this all-sufficient righteousness is the object of the whole Bible. This is the name by which Jesus is called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. But the Scribes and Pharisees completely distorted this cardinal truth of God’s word, a truth which was clearly witnessed to them both by the law and the prophets. Christ was the sum and substance of every institution of the Mosaic law, and to engage therefore, in the observance of any one of its rites without a direct reference to the Redeemer, was equivalent to the mockery of professing to worship Jehovah in the temple, while they disregarded the Shechinah or symbol of His presence which overshadowed the mercy-seat.

The view which is given of Christ in the Jewish economy is so explicit that many of the Jews discerned his glory amid the typical observances, and trusted in Him as the object and end of the law. They felt that if they were bound to obey the commands contained in the law they were equally bound to reverence and believe in Him whom the law revealed. The one duty was equally binding with the other, and merely to yield a blind submission to precepts, without regard-

ing the intention for which they were given, was, instead of faithfully serving God, equivalent to defeating, as far as they could, the ultimate intention for which the statutes had been appointed. The law was given from Sinai not as a mass of ceremonies cumbersome and unmeaning, but "it was added," as the apostle says in his epistle to the Galatians, "because of transgressions." It was added to the promise or covenant made with Abraham 430 years before, not in opposition but in subserviency to it,—to awaken in the mind a sense or conviction of sin, and lead to a firm impression of the necessity of the covenant of grace, thus compelling them to seek refuge in the new and better covenant. This was one peculiar advantage which the Jews might, and many of them did, derive from the Ceremonial Law; and precisely the same advantage accrues to us from the continuance of the Moral Law. It possesses no power to justify the sinner, but it leads us to the knowledge of sin, and thus compels us to submit implicitly to the righteousness of God. It makes no revelation of Him who is the end of the law, but it demands that if a revelation of Christ as our Redeemer has been made, we should immediately believe upon his name. It extends its wide and all-comprehensive requirements over the whole range of possible circumstances, and it denounces its threatenings against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. If, therefore, Christ hath been set forth in the gospel,

and even if in the Mosaic law, he was, however obscurely, exhibited as the ground of justification, we are bound by the commands of that Moral or Natural Law, which is immutable and eternal in its obligations, to accept of the blessings held out to us in the gospel. And indeed it is expressly said, that while he who believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not is condemned already. He is condemned by the terms of that very law, to which, in rejecting Christ, he professes to adhere; he is condemned, because, instead of yielding obedience to the express injunction of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," he dares to disbelieve the record which God hath given of His Son; and not only so, but in rejecting Christ he appeals to the law, as transgressors of which, all the world has become guilty before God. The declarations of Scripture are sufficiently explicit as to the mode of acceptance; and if there is any misunderstanding or mistake upon the subject, it is utterly inexcusable, and may be obviously traced to a determined and obstinate adherence on the part of man to a covenant which hath been for ever done away, and by which whoever dares to seek a justifying righteousness shall inevitably miss it. Though, no doubt, the original end of the law was, the conferment of such a righteousness, this is no longer the case; its only use, and a most important advantage it is, in the matter of justification, is, to warn the poor,

perishing sinner that all hope of safety in himself is for ever gone, and to point him to that ark of safety where alone he can find rest to his soul. Whether we consult the Moral, the Ceremonial, or the Judicial Law, they uniformly harmonise in the declaration, that Christ, and He alone, is the end of the law, of all law, for righteousness. The Mosaic ritual was one grand symbol, and Christ and his salvation were the things signified. It pointed forward the faith of the Jew, humbled under a sense of sin, to Him who in due time should take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and in the case of the believer under the gospel, the Moral Law is productive of precisely the same effect, leading him to Christ, who hath satisfied all its demands, both in regard to obedience and suffering. Christ is its end or perfection, for He hath not only obeyed it, but magnified it and made it honourable. The law hath exhausted its demands upon our Surety, and therefore it no longer possesses the power of communicating life or death to the believer. They who are in Christ are no longer under the law, as a covenant promising life, or threatening death, but they are one with Him who hath fulfilled the whole law, that they might be accepted as righteous in the sight of God, and who hath died for them, that they might never perish, but might have everlasting life. The law cannot relax in its demands, either of perfect obedience to its precepts, or satisfaction due to the

violation of it, but all such demands have been fulfilled by the Christian, not in himself, but in his Surety; and if the sentence of condemnation be cancelled against Him, it is equally so against His people. The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in them, and, consistently with the principles of the Divine government, no further claims can be urged against them. They are complete in Christ, being justified in the sight of God; their persons are accepted, and their natures renewed. They are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God.

The necessity of a perfect righteousness to our justification in the sight of God, Jesus shews, by pointing out the defectiveness of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. The question then naturally suggests itself—In what respects was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees to be considered as defective, whether viewed as a justifying or a sanctifying righteousness?

And in answer to this question we remark:—

1. That the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was defective in its *extent*. It did not reach to the whole law, but was limited to a few, and these comparatively unimportant points. “They tithed mint, and anise, and cummin,” and in so far they did well. The payment of tithes for the support of religion was undoubtedly a sacred duty, binding on every

one who acknowledged the authority of the Word of God. But the error in their case was, that while they were scrupulously attentive to this duty, they neglected the essential duties of justice, and mercy, and truth. The outward duty, instead of being combined with and springing from the inward excellence, was allowed to take its place. And thus a man might be, to all outward appearance, an observer of the law, while at heart, and in the sight of the Searcher of hearts, he was a heinous transgressor of the law. The observance of one class of duties was regarded as affording a valid excuse for the neglect of another. They were scrupulous in their outward observance of the Sabbath, while they were seeking to destroy the Lord of the Sabbath. They devoured widow's houses, and for a pretence they made long prayers. And thus forgetting the great scriptural principle, that "he who offends in one point is guilty of all," they selected a few precepts, by the observance of which they hoped to compensate for the neglect and the manifest transgression of all the rest.

Such, so partial, so limited, was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ; and except our righteousness shall be of a very different description, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The whole law of God must be recognised as entitled to claim our devoted obedience. All its precepts rest on the same divine authority, they are armed with the same awful

sanctions, they demand the same pure and entire observance. The whole law must be obeyed either by us or by our Surety, otherwise we cannot stand accepted with God and enter heaven. And in the matter of sanctification it is not ours to choose which of God's laws we shall obey and which we shall transgress. It must be our most earnest desire to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." It is quite possible that, from some constitutional peculiarity, a man may be inclined to follow one line of duty more than another. But the true believer knowing that the whole law of God is holy, and just, and good, will be ever striving to go on unto perfection. He will not be contented with any measure of righteousness short of that which will at once form a meetness and a preparation for heaven. He is ever "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." There is no partiality in the true Christian's views of the law of God. That which is smooth and easy as being the line of action which is most agreeable to his natural temperament, and that which is so opposed to his natural feelings, that it is like the cutting off of a right hand or the plucking out of a right eye—both it is his earnest anxiety to obey. He would wish to be like God, and instead of finding fault with any of the commandments of God, he feels the yoke of Christ to

be easy and his burden to be light. To the believer the Divine commandments are not grievous. "O that my ways were directed," is his frequent cry, "to keep thy statutes. Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments." It is plain then that in the extent of our obedience our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and how necessary, therefore, that we should be clothed in the righteousness of Emanuel, God with us!

And we remark,

2. That the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was defective in the *principle* from which it arose.

The Scribes and Pharisees both in their teaching and in their example, chiefly, nay, almost exclusively, directed their attention to the outward conduct. This peculiar characteristic of their obedience is frequently reprobated by our blessed Lord, and He quotes as strikingly applicable to them the language of the prophet, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." We are by no means to infer that it was blameable in the Pharisees to be scrupulously watchful over their outward deportment. It was well that they should approve themselves in the sight of all men as sober, decent, honest, upright, blameless characters. But their error lay in expending all their care and anxiety upon the outward man, while the

heart and the affections were utterly disregarded. Hence the strong language of reproof in which our Lord addresses them, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness."

In this particular, also, the principle from which his obedience flows, must the righteousness of the true Christian exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." "My son give me thine heart," is the demand of the heart-searching God; and nothing short of an obedience flowing from a pure and sanctified heart can be acceptable in the sight of God. A mere outward obedience to the demands of the law, such as satisfied the ancient Pharisees, and still contents the modern formalist, comes far short of the Christian's desires and the Christian's wants. He knows that out of the heart are the issues of life, and therefore he keeps his heart with all diligence, praying that, as God is a Spirit, every act of service which he renders to that Spiritual Being may be performed in spirit and in truth. All other service is abomination in the sight of God.

We observe,

3. That the righteousness of the Scribes and Pha-

risees was defective in the *end or design* which they had in view in its performance.

The pervading purpose of all the Pharisee's actings was to be seen of men. He sought only the honour that cometh from man, and if that honour were received his highest object was gained. The desire of the approbation of our fellow-men is at once natural and right, and the man who is utterly careless and indifferent to the opinion of others betrays a hard and depraved heart. But the Pharisee not only loved the praise of man, that in itself were innocent; he loved the praise of man more than the approbation of God. Herein lay his sin. The desire of human approbation was his ruling, his controlling, his all-pervading passion. For this he lived, for this he laboured, for this he fasted, for this he prayed.

Far other, far higher is the end of the true believer's actings. He is not insensible to the good opinion of his fellow-men, but he habitually lives under the impression that it is God with whom he has to do. His friendship is happiness, His "favour is life." To recommend himself therefore to the approval of heaven is his chief desire, and to obtain this he is ready freely to sacrifice his reputation among men, and to be accounted the offscouring of all things. He feels with the apostle that it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment: He that judgeth him is the Lord; and the hour is fast coming when it is not he

that commendeth himself or whom man commendeth, that will be approved, but he only whom the Lord commendeth.

It only remains that we notice,

Lastly, That the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was defective in the *spirit* with which it was performed. It is often set forth in the New Testament, as a marked characteristic of the Scribes and Pharisees, that they were uniformly actuated by a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency. "They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." They thought themselves entitled on account of their imaginary excellencies, not only to the approbation of men, but to the favour of God. "They went about," as the apostle says, "to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God."

Very different is the spirit which actuates the true believing child of God. He feels that all his own righteousnesses are but filthy rags, and that were it not for the free grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus he must for ever perish. He is clothed with humility. He takes his place at the foot of the cross, and lifting up his eye to the crucified one, he breathes forth the prayer, "Lord save me, or I perish."

Such then was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and such are a few of the most prominent points in which our righteousness must exceed theirs,

otherwise we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Their obedience to God's law was limited and partial; they chose to obey some commands and to neglect others; ours must be universal, having a regard to the whole law of God. Their obedience was outward; ours must be that of the heart. They sought above all things the approbation of men; we must seek the honour that cometh from God only. They trusted to their own righteousness for acceptance in the sight of God; we must lay hold of Him who is "the Lord our righteousness." Thus excelling the Pharisee in the *extent*, the *principle*, the *end*, the *spirit* of our righteousness, we shall be prepared to enter the kingdom of heaven.

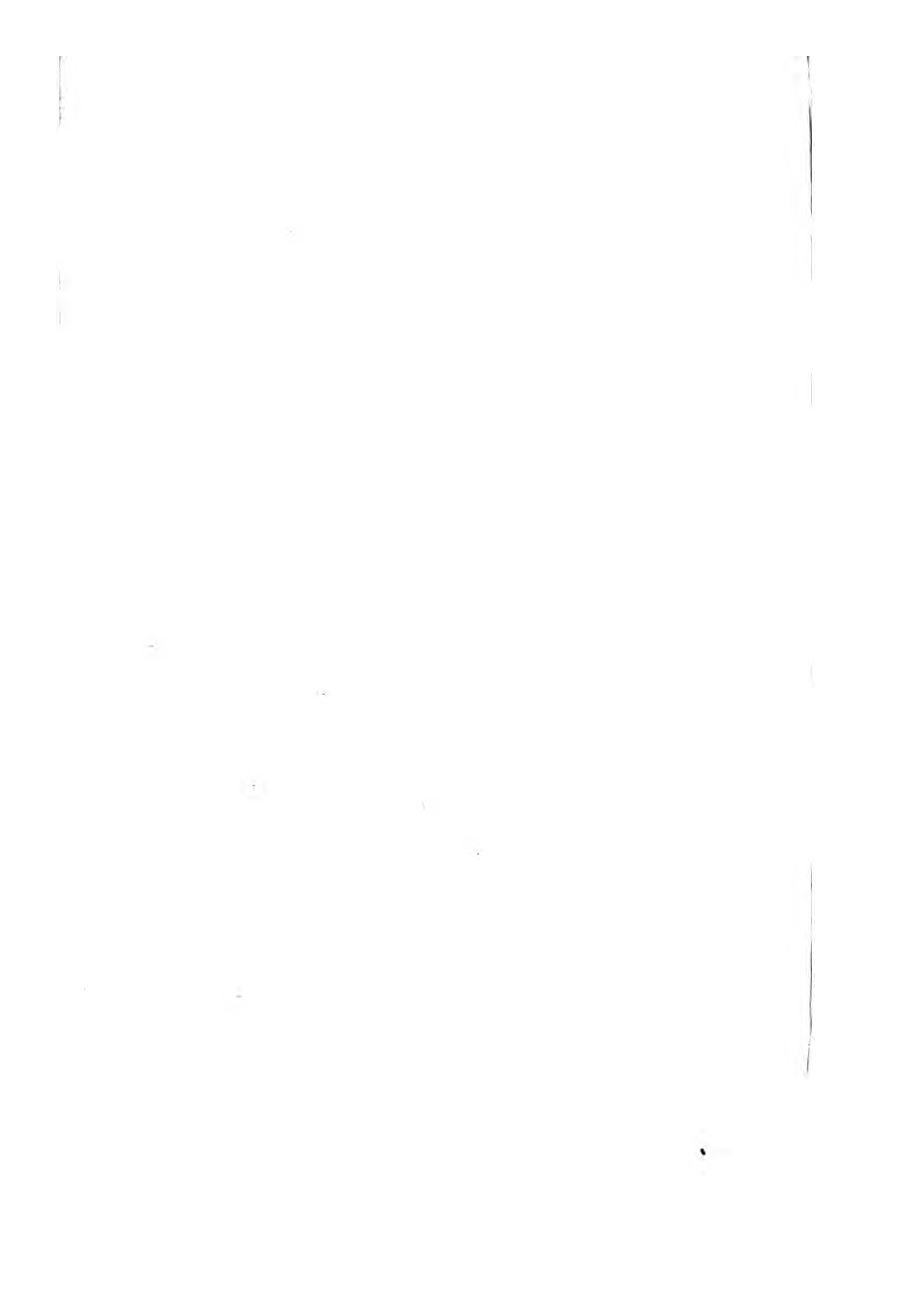
In thus directing the attention of His hearers to the necessity of a higher and a purer righteousness than any they had ever known, He is anxious to shut them up to the faith of the gospel. "I say unto you," He speaks emphatically, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." It may be a righteousness that may recommend you to the respect and admiration of men, but it is not a righteousness which will stand the scrutiny of a judgment day. Righteousness still constitutes, as it has ever done, the ground of acceptance, but it is no longer the righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ,

even the righteousness which is of God by faith. The righteousness which the law demands is perfect, if by *it* we would obtain the promise. In that case we are debtors to do the whole law ; and failing, as we necessarily must, to discharge the debt of obedience which we owe, our destruction must be inevitable. The law, however, having lost all power to justify and save us, the divine mercy hath devised a new and a different plan of salvation ; not by contracting the demands of the law, for the severity of its requirements never can be mitigated, nor the inflexible strictness of its obligations ever be relaxed ; not by withdrawing the original demand of perfect obedience, but by interposing a Mediator whose righteousness constitutes the ground of justification. Thus it is that "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." On this truth we are called to believe ; on this salvation we are invited to depend.

The belief in such truths must evidently include, not merely a conviction of their necessity and a perception of their suitableness to our condition, but also a confidence in the faithfulness of God, that a righteousness hath been obtained by the obedience of Christ unto the death. Thus we have a complete knowledge of the necessity and nature of the fulfilment of the law by Jesus Christ as Mediator, yet if we do not discover such a connection established by God between the expiation for sin and the pardon

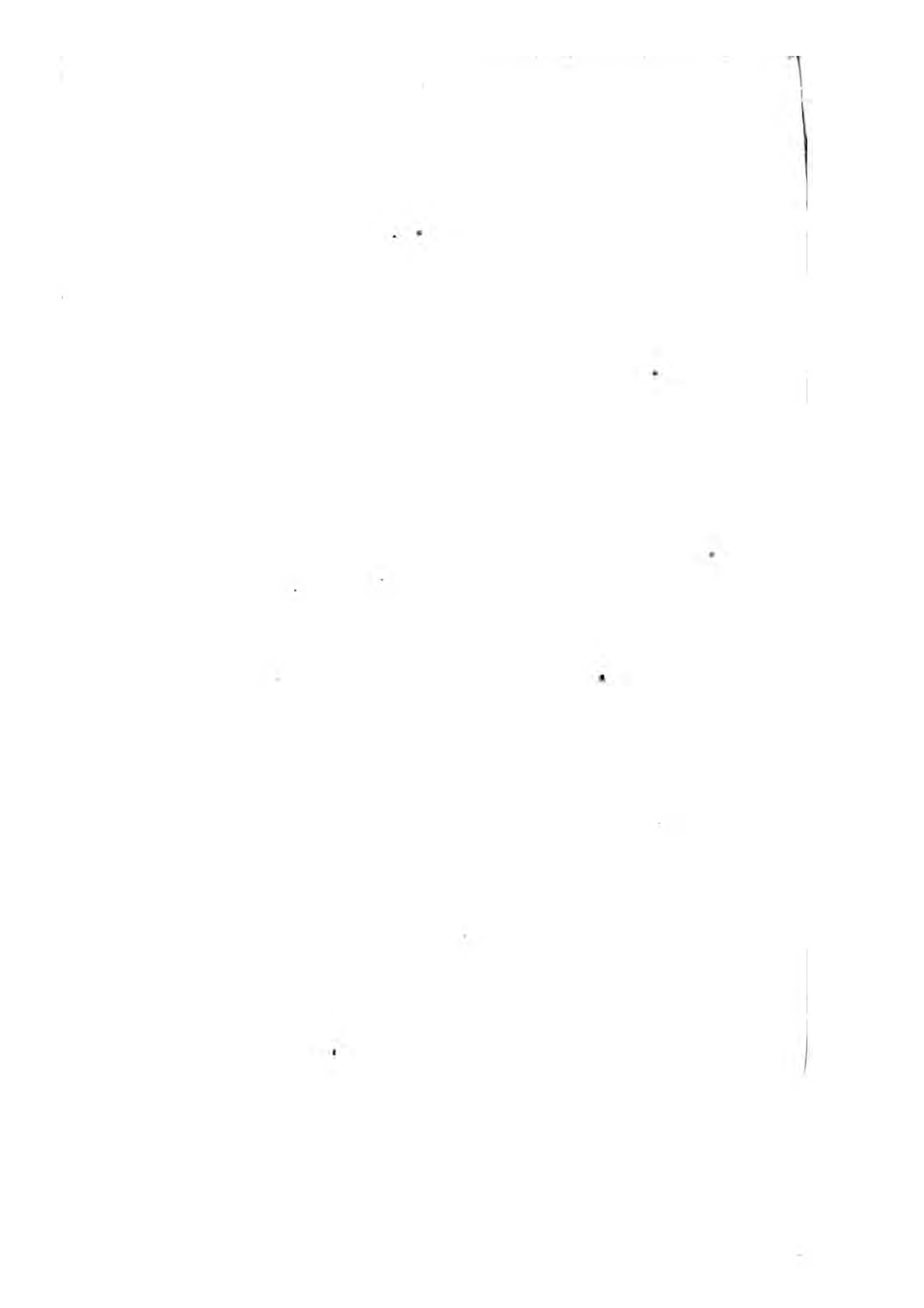
proclaimed in consequence, as to put confidence in the one as much as in the other, we do not truly believe in Jesus as the atonement for the sins of the world. Again, if acquittal at the bar of the Almighty is not believed, on the authority of God, to follow the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ to us, how can we pretend to declare our belief in Christ as the end of the law for righteousness? To trust the faithfulness of God therefore as pledged to fulfil what He has promised, must form an essential part of saving faith. The nature of the object in which our belief is required is not more necessary to be known than is the security of the foundation on which our belief rests. And indeed no man can believe, in any sense, in Christ as his righteousness, without a realizing certainty that his justification is secure. So intimately connected is this righteousness with all that is interesting or important to him either in time or eternity, that if he knows and believes at all in Christ as his hope, he cannot fail to place a habitual trust in the Divine promise which hath connected atonement with pardon and imputed righteousness with justification; we say, a habitual trust, for true faith is not a shadowy evanescent feeling, but a living and ever-growing principle. Every moment we exercise faith in the all meritorious righteousness and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ as the sole ground of hope, the spiritual discernment of its truth becomes more acute,

the spiritual feeling of its importance more vivid, and the whole man more submissive to its influence. Moralists have talked much of a ruling principle or rather passion in the soul, which imparts a peculiarity to the character of individuals. Now faith in Christ is the ruling principle prompting to love, which is the ruling passion in the heart of the Christian. If we habitually repose confidence in Christ as the Lord our righteousness, we enjoy a peace which the world knoweth nothing of, which it can neither give nor take away. We are no longer influenced by the "Spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father." Actuated by a principle of faith, and invested in the righteousness of Christ, it will be our desire to walk in Him, cultivating holiness in heart and life. Thus will our faith be manifested by our works, and walking with Christ upon the earth it will be every day more and more apparent that the life which we live in the flesh is by the faith of the Son of God. Justification is inseparable from sanctification. Let no man therefore flatter himself that he has obtained a title to heaven's blessedness if he is not striving and praying to attain a growing assimilation to heaven's purity. Without an inherent as well as an imputed righteousness, we cannot enter the kingdom of God, for it is plainly declared by the word of Him who cannot lie, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."



PART FIRST.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SCRIBES.



PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

PERVERSION OF THE MORAL LAW.

SECTION I.—THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

MAT. V. 21-26.

THE chief design of Jesus throughout the whole of this invaluable discourse is to show that if man would be accepted with God and be a partaker of eternal life, he must be possessed of a pure and perfect righteousness. The Scribes though the professed teachers of the Law, had lost sight of this great scriptural doctrine. They were deluding the people by perverting the very Word of God and lowering the demands of His holy Law.

To illustrate the hollowness and unscriptural character of the teaching of the Scribes, our Lord selects several plain precepts of the law of God, shewing how completely the vain traditions of the elders were opposed to the true spiritual meaning of these precepts. The first instance which He adduces is the sixth commandment.

V. 21. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment."

These words in the original admit of two interpretations. They may either be rendered thus, "Ye have heard that it was said *to* them of old time," in which case we must understand our Lord as Himself quoting the commandment, and adding to it the interpretation of the Pharisees: or they may be rendered as in our translation, in which case we must understand our Lord as adopting the language of the Pharisees, who were accustomed to quote not from the pure word of God, but from the traditions of the elders. These traditions they regarded as of equal authority with the statements of the Bible, and, accordingly, while in the case before us the quotation is made correctly from the law of Moses, "thou shalt not kill," it is instantly followed up by the unauthorised interpretation of their own commentators, "whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment," that is, he exposes himself to merited punishment at the hands of the civil magistrate. Such was the whole extent of the view which the Scribes held in reference to this command of God. It prohibited murder, no doubt, according to their teaching, but simply in the outward act and as a civil enactment, bringing the murderer under the cognizance of human laws. Such an interpretation of the divine commandment was defective in the extreme. It was limiting

the prohibition to the mere outward act, taking away the life of another, and it was thus preventing the people from perceiving the spirituality of the law as reaching to the thoughts and intentions of the heart ; it pointed to the punishment which the murderer must expect at the hands of man, but it made no account of the awful curse of an angry God. To expose accordingly the erroneous interpretation thus put upon the sixth commandment, Jesus proceeds to explain it in its true spiritual meaning and extent.

V. 22. " But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

He calls the attention of his hearers away from the outward act of murder to the inward principle from which murder springs. He dilates not upon the awful heinousness of the crime of embruing our hands in a brother's blood, taking away that life which He cannot restore, and hurrying a human being into an unknown, perhaps an unprepared eternity ; but He goes down into the very depths of the murderer's heart, and lays bare the first unhallowed feeling which led ultimately to the fatal deed. You say that the outward act of murder is a crime, but I say that

the secret feeling of unreasonable anger is in the sight of God a crime.

It may be that all anger is not sinful as seems to be conveyed by the apostolic command, "Be ye angry, and sin not." There may be, and undoubtedly there is, abstractly speaking, a moral indignation which is angry with the sin, but loves and pities the sinner. Such anger cannot in itself be sinful. We fear, however, that such is the extent to which depravity cleaves to our nature, that it is very difficult to indulge the feeling of anger in any degree without being betrayed into sin. But whether this be the case or not, it is certain at all events, on the authority of Christ Himself, that all anger without a cause, excessive in its nature and unreasonable in its origin, exposes us to the punishment of God as certainly as the act of murder exposes us to the punishment of man.

Angry feelings find vent in reproachful language, and our Lord, tracing the onward course of resentment from its first rise in the heart, declares, "Who-soever shall say to his brother, Raca," or vain fellow, "shall be in danger of the council." It is not the mere use of the word here mentioned which our Lord views as sinful, but it is the malicious feeling which has led to its use. The feeling is supposed to be stronger and more aggravated than in the case of causeless anger, and, accordingly, the punishment which it merits is alleged to be stronger. The former

was in danger of the judgment, or the ordinary courts which, both in Jerusalem and throughout the provinces, took cognizance of minor offences, but this latter is in danger of the council or Sanhedrim, the supreme civil court over which the high priest presided, and which took cognizance of all offences of a deeper dye. But while our Lord thus refers to the civil tribunals of the Jews, it is simply with a view of marking, by analogy, the different degrees of criminality in the sight of God, and the different degrees of punishment which such criminality incurs. For we are expressly taught elsewhere, on the same authority, that while in the righteous award of the final judgment one servant shall be punished with few, another shall be punished with many stripes.

And to shew the Jews that he was not speaking of punishment merely at the hands of the civil magistrate, but that he had in view the awful sentence of a higher tribunal than even the highest of earthly courts, he adds, "Whosoever shall say, Thou fool," or thou profligate person, "shall be in danger of hell-fire." This, in the eye of the searcher of hearts, was the strongest expression of the inward feeling. The once secret smouldering fire of resentment has now burst into a resistless flame. Torrents of angry invective burst from the lips, and the hand is lifted up to inflict the blow which may effectually destroy his neighbour's life. But whether or not the act be committed by the hand, it has at all events been pepe-

trated in the heart. He is a murderer in the eye of God, and if he obtain not forgiveness and repentance, he will assuredly receive the murderer's portion, in that lake of fire which shall never, never be quenched.

How exalted and pure is the morality of heaven, when contrasted with that of earth! Man's commandment is narrow, and limited to the act; God's commandment is exceeding broad, and reaches to the heart. The one commands us to keep our hand from doing evil; the other, to "keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The Holy Jehovah not only forbids all murder, but all that by any possibility might lead to that fearful sin. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." And to remove us the furthest from the most distant approach to such heinous transgressions He issues forth His earnest exhortation, "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any."

Nay, such is the immaculate purity of that God whom we worship, that the indulgence of one unhallowed feeling in the heart, will prevent the acceptance of our most earnest religious services. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. Hence the prayer of the wicked is an abo-

mination, while the prayer of the upright is His delight. Accordingly, our Lord urges upon every one who would desire to offer acceptable worship, that without delay, he seek reconciliation with an injured and offended brother.

Vv. 23 and 24. "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought 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."

Gifts, as well as sacrifices, were appointed of God, under the Jewish economy, and such was the abuse which was often made of divine ordinances, then as well as now, that they endeavoured to compensate for acts of injustice to their fellow-men by presenting costly offerings on the altar of God. Such conduct was in direct opposition to the will of Him who hath declared, "I love mercy better than sacrifice," and so far is Jesus from countenancing this melancholy perversion of divine institutions, that He exhorts every worshipper to keep a strict guard over his spirit, even when engaged in worship. He would not have any one to neglect the instituted gifts and sacrifices. No. The ordinances of God are, in His view, peculiarly precious, and because they are so, He is earnestly desirous that no root of bitterness should spring up to mar their acceptance. The whole law of God must be maintained in its integrity, and the same authority

which hath declared, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," hath also declared, "Thou shalt love thy brother also." It will not do to neglect the one and to observe the other. Both must go together. The absence of the one is regarded as a clear proof of the absence of the other. "If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" If, then, any man would bring his gift to the altar, expressive of his desire to worship God, and to obtain his blessing, and while so engaged, remembers that his brother hath ought against him, so important is it, that while he is lifting up his hands to God they should be holy hands, that our Lord would have him to suspend his sacrifice for a time, that he may go straightway and be reconciled to his brother. This is, in the meantime, the first, the most important duty, because it mars the performance of the other. What a fearful warning to the man who is living in the indulgence of malice, envy, and revenge, who spends the week in acquiring dishonest gains, in blasting his neighbour's reputation, in ruining his neighbour's soul; and, yet, when the day of God comes round, he repairs to the sanctuary with all this leaven of malice and wickedness in his heart, offering up that sacrifice which the Lord abhors! Listen to the words of Jehovah in reference to all such hypocritical worshippers. Isa. i. 11-17. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-

offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts ; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts ? Bring no more vain oblations : incense is an abomination unto me ; the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with : it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new-moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth : they are a trouble unto me ; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear : your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well ; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed ; judge the fatherless ; plead for the widow.”

But we must not understand the Redeemer as discountenancing any man in the worship of his God. He would have the man who has injured his neighbour not to remove his gift from the altar, but to leave it there, and having sought reconciliation with his offended brother, to return immediately to his sacred duties, with clean hands and a pure heart. Such a view of the worship of God could not fail to rebuke the whole spirit of the Pharisees. It was enough with them if the outward act of worship were performed, but they forgot that He to whom the worship is addressed looketh to the feelings and the character of the

worshipper. And even to His own people who are accepted in the Beloved, His command is "Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." If, then, believers, you would wish that your sacred services may be well-pleasing to God, pray that they may be the fruit of a heart sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and that you may draw near with true hearts, in full assurance of faith, having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed with pure water. Thus—thus alone will the Lord accept a gift at your hands, and recognise you as a holy priesthood appointed to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God through Jesus Christ.

If, however, any man, though regular in his attendance on the sanctuary of God, and exemplary, and apparently devout in his observance of all the ordinances of God, shall continue in the indulgence of malicious and revengeful feelings towards his brother, the situation of that man is perilous in the extreme, and our Lord proceeds to warn all such that this is the time of their merciful visitation, and if pardon and reconciliation with God is not now obtained, the hour is fast drawing nigh when they shall have "judgment without mercy."

Vv. 25 and 26. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any

time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

Reconciliation with our injured brother ought to be speedily and urgently sought. This our duty to God, and a prudential regard to our own interests, equally require, and if we shall delay a course of conduct so plainly demanded of us, we may be doomed to perceive, when too late, that we are reaping the bitter fruits of our unforgiving, unkind, and uncharitable spirit. The case supposed by our Lord is that of a man who has either wronged or is in debt to his neighbour. That neighbour has become his adversary, the plaintiff, the prosecutor in a lawsuit, which he has found it necessary to institute against him. Actions at law are at once expensive and vexatious, and it is our duty as far as possible to avoid them. "Why do ye go to law?" asks an apostle, "Why do ye not rather suffer wrong?" It is far safer, far more becoming a Christian, to yield a portion of his rights than to involve himself in unseemly litigation. Far better that we should agree with our adversary as quickly as possible, for "the beginning of strife is like the letting out of water;" we see its commencement, but we know not the consequences which it may bring upon us.

If then a speedy reconciliation with an offended brother be so desirable in matters which concern mere human laws, how much more anxious ought we to be to obtain such a reconciliation, when we consider that all irritable and angry feeling interferes with our dealings with God. We are building with our own hands a wall of separation between us and a God of love, and effectually preventing a single prayer of ours from entering the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. In such a case we have an adversary infinitely more powerful than the deadliest and most determined foe we can encounter among men. God is our adversary. He has a controversy with us. We have done him wrong. We owe Him a debt which we can never hope to pay, a debt of obedience and a debt of punishment. If He be against us who can be our friend? We are on the way to the judgment-seat, and how fearful a thing will it be to fall into the hands of the living God! But blessed be God there is the possibility of an agreement between us and our offended Creator. He hath opened up a way of reconciliation through the blood of atonement. Christ is the daysman between God and the sinner. He hath laid His hand as it were upon the head of both, and hath made peace by the blood of His cross.

If reconciliation with God, then, be possible, there is no time to be lost. We must seek the Lord while He is yet to be found; we must call upon Him while

He is near. We must agree with Him quickly while we are in the way. Our day of grace will soon be past, and if death shall overtake us before that reconciliation with God be effected, then our ruin is certain. We shall be cast into the prison of hell, and there we shall remain until we have paid the uttermost farthing, the last item of that awful debt of punishment which the law and the justice of God imperatively demand. And when shall that last payment be made? Never! no, never! Sin is an infinite evil, and demands an infinite punishment. The smoke of the sinner's torment, therefore, must ascend up for ever and ever. But Jesus hath endured the punishment in our room, and though His sufferings were limited in duration, yet, being the sufferings of a God-man, they were infinite in value, and afforded a perfect satisfaction for sin. There is no condemnation, therefore, to them that are in Christ Jesus. The debt which we owe to God's law,—a debt of obedience and a debt of punishment,—must be paid. God cannot depart one hair's breadth from the demands of His holy law, and of His inflexible justice, and His spotless purity. The payment must be made either by us or by our surety, and if we will not accept of the substitute we must pay the debt for ourselves even to the uttermost farthing. There can be no mitigation of the demand. Eternity will be too short for the discharge of this debt. Thousands and tens

of thousands of ages will roll over our heads, but the debt will still be only in course of being paid, the undying worm will only gnaw the more keenly, and the fiery lake will only burn the more brightly, and the poor infatuated sinner will experience all the more intensely the wrath of an angry God. "Who can dwell with devouring fire, who can lie down with everlasting burning?"

How solemn, then, the command of Christ, "Agree with thine adversary quickly." Accept the terms which He Himself has laid down. He knows that you are utterly unable to pay the debt, and therefore He is ready for the sake of Jesus frankly to forgive you the whole. He makes no conditions, He has no reservation in the offer. It is all of grace, free, unbounded grace. The surety has been obtained, the debt has been paid, the discharge has been given, and now He proclaims peace, He offers reconciliation. Is His hand stretched out in vain? Is there a man, a woman, a child, who can read unmoved such tidings of mercy; who can spurn from them the offered substitute? Would that every soul were persuaded to flee from the wrath to come! We are still on the way. Yes, as long as we are on this side the grave all hope of agreement and reconciliation with God is not cut off. As we pass along in our journey through life we may discern at every little interval the expressive fingerpost pointing to the city of refuge.

Sinner escape for thy life. Make no tarrying. Eternity is at hand. The Judge is at the door. To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your heart.

SECTION II.—SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

MAT. V. 27-32.

As a farther illustration of the spiritual meaning and extent of the law of God in opposition to the limited views of the Scribes and Pharisees, our Lord quotes the seventh commandment of the Decalogue.

Vv. 27 and 28. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery : But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” It was scarcely possible for the Scribes to limit this commandment, as they did the sixth, to the mere outward act, inasmuch as the tenth commandment expressly declares “Thou shalt not *covet* thy neighbour’s wife,” a prohibition evidently extending to the thoughts of the mind, and the desires of the heart. Yet to obviate this difficulty, which would force itself on the mind of every reflecting man, the Jewish teachers made a strange and most unwarranted distinction in this matter

between the Jew and the Gentile, alleging that God would never charge upon an Israelite, though he undoubtedly would upon the uncircumcised, any thought, however sinful in itself, which did not terminate in the commission of a sinful action. In this way they persuaded the descendants of Abraham that in so far as they were concerned, the seventh commandment prohibited no more than the actual commission of adultery. Jesus, however, declares in the face of the assembled multitudes, that such an interpretation, though supported by the most learned Jewish Rabbis, was completely opposed to the whole spirit and meaning of the law of God. He solemnly declares that not only the man who is guilty of the crime of adultery is to be regarded as a transgressor of the seventh commandment, and therefore exposed to the wrath of the righteous Jehovah ; but the lustful look, the impure thought, the carnal desire, stamps a man in the sight of God as guilty of the sin of adultery. The language of the passage, you observe, shews not only that he is guilty of what leads, or may eventually lead to the commission of this heinous sin, but even in casting that look, in entertaining that unhallowed feeling, " he has *already* committed adultery with the woman in his heart." The sin has been committed in the sight of God, who searcheth the heart, and though man can only take cognizance of the outward act as indicating the state of the heart,

God looks directly at the secret workings of the soul. How extensive then is the bearing of this holy commandment! It is truly a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And if there is one sin which is described in the Word of God as more than another calling forth his righteous judgments, it is the very sin which this commandment prohibits, a sin which debases and degrades the man to a level with the brutes that perish, darkening his mind and hardening his heart, and depraving his whole nature, rendering him despised and polluted in the eyes of man, and abhorred in the estimation of a holy God. What can be more at variance with that purity of heart in which God delights than the indulgence of unholy thoughts and impure desires. "Fornication and all uncleanness," says an apostle, "let it not be once named among you as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient" or proper. "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Among the heinous sins enumerated in this black catalogue, those of uncleanness occupy the first and most conspicuous place, for these are the sins which more especially unfit the soul for that communion with God in which consists the very essence of Christianity :

Hence the apostle in writing to the Corinthian Church, uses arguments on this subject which ought to have peculiar weight with every redeemed child of God. "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What! know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two (saith he) shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God? and ye are not your own, For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." These are words of no ordinary significance. Let the young believer ponder them deeply, and earnestly strive and pray that he may "flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul."

There is no class of sins which abound to a more lamentable extent in the present day than those to which we now point. Uncleaness and its twin-sister drunkenness, both born of the devil, are the scandal of every part of our land. How much do they weaken the hands and discourage the heart of the Christian minister! How early and rapidly do

they corrupt the hearts of the young, and shed a withering blight over the sweetest and purest natural affections of the soul! How many young men and women who might have been the ornaments, and under God the strength of the Church, have they ruined in this world, and through eternity! "For this ye know," saith the word of the living God, "that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

There is a peculiarity in the sin of unchastity which does not attach to other sins. Such is the depraved nature which we carry about with us, so desperately wicked is the human heart when unpurified by the Spirit of God, that evil communications speedily corrupt good manners, and impurity in word or behaviour exerts a most polluting influence upon all around. The flesh, the corrupt nature even in the child of God, retains such a firm hold, that Scripture adopts the strongest language in speaking of the struggle which the Christian maintains in subduing the evil propensities of his nature. Thus, "they that are Christ's" are said to "have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and our blessed Lord, alluding to the same difficult and arduous contest exhorts his hearers;

Vv. 29 and 30. "And if thy right eye offend

thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee : for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." These words express, in very strong and emphatic language, the difficulty, and yet the absolute necessity, of denying ourselves to all ungodliness and worldly lusts. Evil inclinations and tendencies are often fondly cherished, as a right eye or a right hand. We feel so reluctant to part with them, that the very thought of it is painful. They have been long and tenderly indulged, so that they have become a part, as it were, of our very nature, as necessary to our happiness as the most useful organs of the body to the completeness and healthful operation of our bodily structure. The desire of preserving our natural lives is one of the strongest instinctive feelings in the human constitution. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Often, accordingly, when the body is afflicted with severe and apparently fatal disease, will a man submit to the most painful operation, yea, even the loss of the most useful member of his body, if there is a prospect that thereby his life will be prolonged. If then, we are so anxious for the preservation of our mere natural life, how much more anxious should we

be for the preservation of the life of the soul. If to arrest the stroke of death we will consent to part with a right eye or a right hand, indispensable though they may seem to our bodily comfort; how much more readily should we part with the dearest and most fondly cherished lusts, rather than be cast soul and body into hell. The surgical operation may be painful to the man who is obliged to submit to it, but more painful still is the crucifying of the flesh with its unhallowed desires. In both cases, however, the pain is gladly endured to avoid the threatened evil, temporal death in the one, and eternal death in the other. Better, far, that a man should go maimed all his life, than that his days should be brought to a premature end; and does not the argument acquire a thousandfold greater force when the evil to be averted is an eternity of woe? And what is it after all that is parted with, to prevent the death of the soul? Many plausible excuses might be made for the man who, even to save his life, shall hesitate to part with members so useful and almost indispensable as a right eye or a right hand. But is there any one evil desire that a man can indulge, which can for a single moment be set over against the loss of the soul? "What would it profit a man though he should gain the whole world and lose his soul; yea, what would a man give in exchange for his soul?" The pleasures of sin are but for a moment; the consequences of sin

reach through eternity. Would it not be infinitely preferable then, to cast away the old man with his corruptions and lusts, rather than to retain your impure and unsanctified nature, and be plunged along with it into the all-devouring flames of eternal torment? Let your choice be made then, firmly and decidedly. Momentary pleasure and eternal pain, or momentary pain and eternal bliss.

As intimately connected with the subject of the seventh commandment, our Lord adverts to a point on which the Jewish teachers were somewhat divided in opinion, the lawfulness of the dissolution of the marriage bond.

Vv. 31 and 32. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." The law of Moses on the subject of divorce is found in Deut. xxiv. 1-5, which was interpreted by many of the Jews, particularly of the school of Hillel, as authorising a man to put away his wife for the most trifling reason. There can be no doubt, that because of the hardness of their hearts, and to prevent still greater evils, God was pleased for a time to extend the law of divorce beyond the nar-

row limits within which it is restricted by our Lord. Such a temporary arrangement was eagerly laid hold of by the Jewish teachers, and perverted as an encouragement of the most lax views as to the obligation of the marriage vow. They inculcated the doctrine at which our Lord here points, that on whatever grounds a man might think fit to part with his wife, he was quite warranted in doing so, if only he strictly adhered to the various legal forms by which the divorce was effected. If a written instrument had been procured from the proper quarter, and was signed and attested by the competent authorities, the divorce was regarded by the Scribes as perfectly valid, in the eye both of God and of man. The cause of the divorce was with them of little consequence, provided the regular formalities attendant on the act of separation were scrupulously observed. Our Lord, however, brings back the law of marriage to an accordance with the original design of this benevolent and gracious institution, and he absolutely prohibits divorce, except on the ground of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.

It was while man was yet in a state of innocence, and before sin had blighted his earthly happiness, that God said concerning him, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make an helpmeet for him," and having formed woman, he brought her to the man, and Adam said, "This is bone of my bone,

and flesh of my flesh. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh." From the period at which marriage was originally instituted, it is quite plain that it was intended for man as a human being, independently altogether of the changes which sin might introduce, and it is equally plain, that had man not sinned, the marriage tie could in no case have been broken. Unfaithfulness would have been unknown, and death would not have occurred to separate the parties from each other. Now, however, even the happiest unions are dissolved by death, and the parties will never again renew their marriage tie, for "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

The wise and gracious institution of marriage, however, though designed to survive the fall, and to exist as long as man exists upon the earth, hath, like all the other appointments of our heavenly Father, suffered not a little from the introduction of sin into the world. What was intended for the comfort and happiness of man often proves one of his bitterest and severest trials, and the companion of his life is sometimes found to be a thorn in the flesh, marring his earthly enjoyment and ruining his soul. How awful the depravity of our nature, that what was so manifestly designed for a blessing should be so often converted into a curse, and what might have been

the source of our sweetest enjoyments be poisoned and polluted by the iniquity of our hearts! Nay, sin in its darkest and most hideous form—unfaithfulness to the marriage vow—hath sometimes swept, as with a desolating blast, over the once happy home, and virtually dissolved that tie by which the parties had bound themselves to mutual fidelity, until God should separate them by death. In such a case as this, the marriage oath is broken, and our Lord declares that a divorce or a legal disruption of the union is in complete harmony with the Word and the Law of God. On this subject we find Jesus expressing Himself at considerable length on another occasion, Mat. xix. 3-9. “The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And He answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say

unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery : and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

The marriage-tie is a sacred bond instituted by God himself, and " what God hath joined together let no man dare to put asunder." The man must possess the nature of a fiend of darkness who would venture to intrude into the privacy of a united and happy family, and throw firebrands and death all around him, whether by malicious and groundless insinuations, or by direct seductions to sin. We know no fairer scene that this world can present, none on which the smile of a God of love can more delight to dwell, than the peaceful and cheerful home of a happy, though humble, pair, who have first given themselves to the Lord, and then to one another in the Lord, and who are seeking to walk before Him as heirs together of the grace of life, heavenly-minded, in purity and holiness, as members of the body of Christ. Observe and ponder well the spirit which ought to animate the Christian in this endearing relation of life : Eph. v. 21-33, " Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church : and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the

wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." These are not the words of man, but of the living God: they unfold to us the whole secret of domestic happiness. It is only to be found in imbibing and cultivating the spirit of heavenly love, akin in nature, though infinitely inferior in degree, to that love wherewith Christ loved His Church; but how can such a feeling be habitually exercised in those unhappy cases where the believer is yoked with an unbeliever—Christ with Belial? Even then will the Christian hus-

band, or the tender, affectionate, believing wife, meekly and patiently endure, weeping and praying in secret, without murmur or complaint, knowing that it is the Lord's yoke, and He will strengthen them to bear it. Such a trial as this is peculiarly heavy, but the duty is plain. God Himself hath taught us His will concerning us in these painful circumstances, 1 Peter iii. 1 and 2, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."

Thus you perceive that the love which ought to animate the believer, in this tender relation, is no common love, no mere natural affection. It is a sanctified, a holy love, not leading his heart away from God, but drawing out his affections more warmly to that God from whom he has received his wife, and to whom he strives, and trusts, and prays he shall at last be able to present her "holy and without blemish." For her sake he watches over his own heart and his own conduct, that he may be an example to her in all holy conversation and godliness, and it is his heart's desire and prayer to God that his wife and children may, along with himself, be privileged to join the happy family of the redeemed in glory, and unite in fervent ascriptions of praise to Him who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

SECTION III.—THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

MAT. V. 33-37.

It seems to have been the chief design of our blessed Lord, throughout his Sermon on the Mount, to vindicate the law of God from the perverse interpretations of the Scribes and Pharisees. For this purpose He selects three specific commandments of the Moral Law, the Sixth, the Seventh, and the Third. The two first-mentioned we have already considered in the two previous sections, and it only now remains that we consider the last, which He introduces to the notice of His hearers in these words:—

V. 33. “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.” In the two cases in which, as we have already seen, our Lord has exposed the erroneous views of the Scribes, the very words of the Moral Law were plainly quoted,—“Thou shalt not kill,” “Thou shalt not commit adultery,”—so that we might have some difficulty in ascertaining whether the quotation was to be understood as made directly by our Lord himself, or as taken from the mouth of the Pharisees; but in the present instance there can be no such difficulty.

The express words of the Third Commandment are not even referred to, and the erroneous tradition of the Elders is substituted in place of the Word of God; and the presumption therefore is, that in all the three cases in which our Lord adverts to the Moral Law, He quotes the very language of the Scribes in their instructions to the people.

In this view it may perhaps appear strange, that the Third Commandment should have been interpreted as meaning nothing more than, "Thou shalt not forswear" or perjure "thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath;" but let us examine the matter a little more minutely. The words of the Divine Law run thus—"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," or, rendering it more literally, "Thou shalt not take up the name of the Lord thy God to vanity or a falsehood." There is no doubt that the leading idea conveyed by these words is, Thou shalt not swear falsely by the name of the Lord thy God; and, indeed, it is thus rendered by three of the ancient versions. The Scribes, accordingly, adopting the narrowest and most restricted view of the commandment, interpreted it as prohibiting all false swearing by the name Jehovah; and, in support of this view, they quoted Lev. xix. 12, "Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God." An oath by the name Jehovah was sacred or binding, according to the teach-

ing of the Jewish Rabbins ; but an oath by any creature, with the exception of the ornaments and offerings of the temple, they regarded as of little or no importance.

Perjury or false swearing is no doubt primarily forbidden by the Third Commandment ; for what does this sin amount to but an open insult to the God of Truth by calling upon Him to bear us out in testifying to a falsehood ? In such a case we are appealing to Him as the Searcher of Hearts, to vindicate the truth of our testimony or the sincerity of our promise, at the very moment when we know that we are swearing to a lie. Such a crime is at once an outrage against the God of heaven, and a violation of the fundamental obligations of human society. For by the common agreement of mankind an oath is to them, for confirmation, an end of all strife. This is the strongest evidence that can be given or is ever demanded of the truth of our testimony. But when a man has shewn himself capable of trampling under foot the sacred obligation of an oath, he has given the most lamentable proof that his heart is utterly depraved, and his conscience seared as with a hot iron.

And the same remarks which we have thus made in reference to oaths in transactions among men, may be considered as applicable to vows and voluntary engagements which we solemnly promise to fulfil. Observe in what striking language the Israelites speak

of their engagements in reference even to the accursed nations of Canaan,—Josh. ix. 19 and 20 : “ But all the princes said unto all the congregation, we have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel : now, therefore, we may not touch them. This we will do to them ; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.” And it is well worthy of remark that there is no sin against which the righteous judgments of God have been more frequently and more fearfully manifested than the sin of false swearing. Thus, indeed, He hath expressly threatened, by his servant Malachi, iii. 5 ; “ And I will come near to you to judgment ; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me the Lord of hosts.”

But while the Scribes were no doubt justified by the very language of the Third Commandment in considering it as prohibiting the heinous sin of swearing falsely by the name of God, they diluted and destroyed the force of the holy statute by the introduction of a distinction for which there is no warrant in the Word of God, that oaths are to be considered, some of a serious and some of a lighter description. In the view of a Scribe, an oath became serious, solemn and sacred by

the direct use of the name of God or Jehovah ; but however frequently, needlessly and irreverently a man might swear even in common conversation, it was regarded as a matter of little or no importance, provided he could succeed in avoiding the use of the name of the Divine Being. By thus substituting for the holy word of the living God a vain tradition of the Elders, the Scribes destroyed among the Jewish people all reverence for an oath, and rendered the custom of profane swearing fearfully prevalent among all classes of society.

In this state of matters Jesus holds forth the Divine commandment as not only prohibiting the use of the name of God in support of false statements, but all irreverent, profane and needless oaths of every description whatever.

Vv. 34, 35 and 36. "But I say unto you, swear not at all : neither by heaven ; for it is God's throne : Nor by the earth ; for it is his footstool : neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great King : Neither shalt thou swear by thy head ; because thou canst not make one hair white or black." These words have sometimes been regarded as absolutely prohibiting the use of oaths even on the most solemn occasions or in courts of law. And on the ground of this single passage, some sects, both in ancient and modern times, have denied the lawfulness of an oath, and have re-

garded it as sinful to swear upon any occasion. But it is quite plain from the illustrations which our Lord here uses, that he is referring to profane swearing in ordinary conversation, and not to oaths for solemn and important purposes. Besides, He Himself lent the force of His example in favour of the lawfulness of oaths in courts of law. Thus, when the High Priest put Him upon oath, using the solemn form, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God;" though He had hitherto remained silent, He now acknowledges the power of the appeal, and instantly replies, "Thou hast said." There are many examples of oaths both in the Old and in the New Testament, and more especially the Prophet Jeremiah, iv. 2, lays down the inward animating principles by which we ought to be regulated in taking an oath on solemn and important occasions. "And thou shalt swear, the Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory."

Our Lord must not therefore be understood in using the apparently general command "Swear not at all," as declaring it to be sinful on all occasions to resort to an oath, but He is obviously pointing out to the Jews that the Third Commandment, which had hitherto been limited by the Scribes to false swearing by the name Jehovah, extended to all profane, needless,

irreverent appeals to God, whether directly or indirectly. This command, as if He had said, reaches not only to the judicial crime of perjury, of which even human laws can take cognizance, but to the sin of profane swearing, of which human laws take no cognizance at all. Ye say "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths." But I say Swear not at all, even by those oaths which are so current among you, and which, because the name of God is not directly included in them, you regard as comparatively innocent. Such a plea cannot be for a moment sustained. If you swear at all, whether you mention the name of God or not, you can only be understood as appealing for the truth of your statement to the great Searcher of Hearts, who alone can attest the truth and sincerity of what you affirm.

"Swear not at all," then, says Jehovah-Jesus, if you would not profane the name of the Most High; neither by heaven, for though you may think you are avoiding the use of the name of God, you are swearing by the throne of God, and, therefore, if your appeal has any meaning whatever, it is addressed to Him that sitteth upon the throne; neither by the earth, for though you may think it has no relation to the name of God, it is Jehovah's footstool, and as an oath can only be an appeal to an intelligent being, you are swearing by Him whose footstool the earth

is ; neither by Jerusalem, for far from such an oath being unconnected with God, that is the city of the Great King, and the place which He hath chosen to put his name there ; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for so especially does Jehovah claim it as His own that He numbers the very hairs, and so little is the power which thou hast over it, that thou canst not make one hair white or black. In short, the doctrine which Jesus teaches by the use of those various illustrations, drawn from the customary forms of swearing among the Jews, is so extensively applicable, that it is impossible for any man to discover, in all God's wide creation, a single object on which he can found an oath, that will not be in reality, and in the eye of God's holy law, an appeal to the Creator Himself. If we swear at all, then, we can swear by no other than the living God, for He alone can attest the sincerity of our hearts, and He alone, therefore, can be appealed to, as the witness to the truth of that which we are seeking to confirm by an oath. The distinction of the Pharisee, between the more serious and lighter oaths, is thus shown to be utterly unfounded. All oaths are serious, all are an appeal to God, and to use them on any other than the most solemn and important occasions, is to incur the guilt of one of the most daring, unprovoked, and heinous transgressions of the law of God.

And yet how lamentably does the sin of profane

swearing everywhere abound! The holy name of God is often taken into the mouth, with an irreverent lightness and a daring presumption, sufficient to draw down the righteous judgments of heaven, upon the reckless worm of the dust that ventures to insult the Almighty to His face. It is surely unnecessary that the man who can thus profane the name of God should be declared to be a stranger to his grace. Nay, David expressly says, "Thine enemies take thy name in vain." The profane swearer is an open and avowed enemy of the Most High, and we have the solemn assurance, that Jehovah "will not hold that man guiltless;" and though men may pass him by as violating no human law, He that sitteth in the heavens will one day avenge His insulted majesty, and pour upon him the vials of His righteous indignation as an aggravated sinner. Swearing is a gratuitous, open, unprovoked, heaven-daring crime, on account of the prevalence of which, the land in which we live has the deepest cause to mourn.

And it is not only among the openly ungodly in the world around us that profane swearing abounds, but even among professing Christians this sin is far from being unknown. An idea is often secretly cherished somewhat similar to that which we have seen was indulged by the Jews in the time of our Lord, and provided they can disguise the name of God, or even avoid the use of it altogether, many pacify

their consciences, while they habitually indulge in the use of minced oaths, or the profane utterance of short prayers, as a common mode of exclamation in ordinary conversation. You will not unfrequently hear from the mouth of those who are not strangers to a throne of grace, such expressions as "bless me," "pity me," "preserve me," and other similar addresses, which can only be made to the Most High, and simply because they have not used the name of God, such persons flatter themselves that they are not guilty of profane swearing. But the explanation given by our Redeemer shews, that the third, like all the other commandments, is exceeding broad. It demands that we abstain absolutely and altogether from the use of oaths, except on the most solemn and important occasions, and that even then the oath must be regarded as a religious exercise, in which we engage with the whole soul, swearing "in truth, in judgment and in righteousness." There can be no difficulty, we conceive, in distinguishing between the cases in which an oath is lawful and those in which it is sinful. It is only in a case of absolute necessity that a solemn appeal ought to be made to heaven, and there can be no doubt that in the innumerable instances in which the name of God is used lightly, and without deep, serious thought, the Third Commandment has been plainly transgressed. And even where the name of God is not used directly, but the works or word

or ways of God, are used as the medium by which we insult the great Creator, and Preserver, and Governor of all; even then we are charged by the law of God as guilty of the heinous sin of profane swearing. The regulating principle of ordinary life, in so far as the government of the tongue is concerned, is thus laid down by our blessed Lord.

V. 37. "But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

The evident design of the Redeemer in issuing forth such an exhortation as this, is to point out to His hearers that in speech as well as in behaviour, the Christian ought ever to be characterised by the utmost simplicity and godly sincerity. His ordinary intercourse with his fellow-men, must be so guarded and so trustworthy, that his word is the same as an oath. His yea, is yea, and his nay, nay. He has no need to strengthen his affirmations or denials, by any such unhallowed appeals to heaven as those to which the ungodly resort. He feels that at all times he is in the presence of Him that loveth truth in the inward parts, and, therefore, he sets a watch over the door of his lips lest he should offend against God. For whatsoever is more, says our Lord, than a simple affirmation or denial, cometh of evil. It arises from some evil disposition or feeling in the heart, either a

consciousness that what we are saying is untrue, and must, therefore, be supported by some strong asseveration, or a want of reverence for divine things, which leads us to trifle with the name of God, or an idea that it is manly to bid defiance to the God of heaven. Or, still further, as the words may be rendered, "it cometh from the evil one" who is the source of all sinful feelings, and words, and deeds. The Devil knows well that the tongue is "an unruly member, full of deadly poison," and how can he more effectually ensnare men to their everlasting ruin, than by leading into the indulgence of a habit, which, more perhaps than any other, betrays a heart full of the deadliest enmity to God and holiness? That tongue which was designed to be the glory of man, and to be the instrument of shewing forth the praises of God, is employed in uttering the language of horrid blasphemy, and invoking the wrath of God, to come down upon the swearer's own head and upon the heads of others. What a spectacle must the blasphemer of Jehovah's name present to the holy angels! That name which is to them the object of adoring wonder, and admiration, and awe, made the sport of a reckless mortal on the brink of eternity! Tremble sinner,—thoughtless, inconsiderate man,—that thou hast ever dared, with these lips, with that tongue, to insult the Highest, the Holiest of all. And ye who profess to fear God, is it seemly that your conversation and whole deportment,

whether in word or in deed, should be any other than that which becometh the gospel of Christ? Ye are not your own. That tongue, which is naturally a fire, a world of iniquity, defiling the whole body, and setting on fire the course of nature while itself has been set on fire of hell, that very tongue has been purchased by the blood of Christ, that both in time and through eternity it might celebrate the praises of redeeming love. Learn then to sing the song of the Lamb even upon earth, and strive and pray that your speech may be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

But why so guarded in the talk of our lips? Is no scope to be given to the fervent imagination, the ardent, eager mind? Undoubtedly. A narrative may be beautifully depicted, and yet it may be faithfully true. But it must never be forgotten that every, even the slightest departure from the simplicity that is in Christ, cometh of evil. It is evil in itself, and springs from the evil one. Let every man then speak the truth, in all simplicity and in all sincerity, to his neighbour, remembering that into heaven, there shall enter nothing that defileth, that worketh abomination, or that loveth and maketh a lie.

CHAPTER II.

PERVERSION OF THE CIVIL LAW.

MAT. V. 38-42.

THE Jewish Law is usually divided into three parts, the Ceremonial Law, the Moral Law, and the Civil, Judicial, or Political Law. In all its various branches, this wonderful system of legislation, dictated by God Himself, was completely perverted by the Scribes and Pharisees. The Ceremonial Law beautifully represented, as in a picture, the spiritual doctrines of the Christian dispensation, and pointed to Him, who, by His one offering, was destined in the fulness of time to perfect for ever them that are sanctified. Yet such was the blindness of the Jewish teachers, that they mistook the type for the ~~antitype~~, the shadow for the substance; and represented salvation as flowing not from Christ, but from a careful observance of the rites and institutions of the Law of Moses.

The Moral Law, we might have supposed, would have surely, from its simple and comprehensive shortness, escaped the misrepresentations of these blind

teachers of the blind. But even the Ten Commandments, containing the sum and substance of all moral obligation, are so diluted and weakened by their false interpretations, that we have found our Lord selecting three of the plainest commands of the Decalogue—the sixth, the seventh, and the third—as flagrant instances of the mode, in which the Scribes could destroy the force of the simplest commandments of the holy law of God.

Nor were even the civil enactments of the Jewish code free from the false glosses of the Scribes. In this department, also, of the Mosaic institutions the people had been completely misled by those who professed to sit in Moses' seat, and the result had been, that the whole tone of society had undergone a melancholy change. Instead of that spirit of love which the law of God was designed to enforce, a spirit of malice, and enmity, and revenge had diffused itself widely throughout all ranks of the people, and was fast threatening to dissolve the ties which bound the community together.

V. 38. “Ye have heard, that it hath been said, An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” Such was the well-known law of retaliation as laid down in Exod. xxi. 24 and 25, “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Much has been

said of this law as if it were scarcely consistent with justice, and belonged only to a barbarous and uncivilized age. And yet is it not plain, that the very principle which this enactment involves, the proportioning of the punishment to the injury, is not only consistent with natural equity, but lies at the very foundation of the criminal law even of our civilised age? Nor does it appear that the law of retaliation, as laid down in the passage we have quoted from Exodus, was a compulsory mode of retribution. The public magistrate was bound, as he is even at this day, to act upon the principle of the law of retaliation, but he was not bound to act upon it in the precise mode in which the law is set forth. Thus it is said, Num. xxxv. 31, "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer," plainly implying that for lesser offences satisfaction might be taken. Josephus, accordingly, informs us that the law was understood as allowing a compensation in money, which was regulated in amount by the extent of injury sustained. And this very principle, it is well known, is recognised in the laws of our own country.

To understand, then, the remarks of our Lord upon the law of retaliation, we must bear in mind that it was laid down for the guidance of the civil magistrate alone. It would appear, however, that according to the teaching of the Scribes, it was lawful for a private individual to avenge his own wrongs, and instead of repairing to the civil magistrate, to apply the law of

retaliation to his own case.- Against this gross perversion of a plain civil enactment of the Jewish law, a perversion resulting in the most injurious consequences to society at large, our blessed Lord thus strongly remonstrates :

V. 39. "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil."
In these words, the Redeemer leaves the law of retaliation precisely where he found it, as a civil enactment for the guidance of the public magistrate. But He plainly declares that, as a law of individual and private revenge, it is contrary to the whole spirit of God's word, which, instead of being a spirit of vengeance, is a spirit of love. The law for the regulation of the world, as a world of sinful and rebellious creatures, hateful and hating one another, is the law of retaliation, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." For the preservation of society, it is absolutely necessary that the passions of individuals be restrained, and the crimes be punished. Injury must be met by the legal infliction of corresponding injury, and power must be repelled by power. But such is not the law of the kingdom of Christ. It is a law of love, not of hatred ; a law of meekness, and forgiveness, and brotherly kindness, not the law of retaliation, wrong for wrong. "I say unto you, resist not evil." Not that the child of God is tamely to submit to the infliction of any wrong, however unjust, or the endurance of any in-

jury, however unmerited, but as a follower of Him who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, he is not to cultivate a spirit of revenge but of meek submission.

To illustrate the nature of the spirit which He means to inculcate by the command "That ye resist not evil," Jesus adduces three examples of injuries which the Christian may be called to sustain. Believers are, in this world, like sheep in the midst of wolves, and it is of the utmost importance that they should ever remember what spirit they are of. They are liable to be injured in their persons, in their property, and in their liberty; but, in all cases, the same spirit must actuate the child of God. Instead of hastening to avenge his own wrongs, and to procure the punishment of the individual who may have wronged him, his ought to be the Christian love which "suffereth long and is kind," "which is not easily provoked," "which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." The laws of men proportion the punishment to the offence; but if you would know the limits of the law of love among God's children, listen to the reply of Jesus when he was asked, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" "I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven."

The *first* instance to which our Lord refers, as affording opportunity for the exercise of the principle

of Christian meekness and submission, is a case of injury to the *person* of the believer.

V. 39. "But whosoever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also."

The injury here mentioned is one of a very slight description, involving rather an indignity and affront, than any positive wound inflicted upon the body. Nevertheless, this is one of those cases which would the most readily call forth the revenge of the unrenewed man. His wounded pride would rouse him to instant retaliation. He would feel that he was justified in taking the law into his own hands, and in punishing the party who had thus insulted him. The spirit of the Christian, however, is a spirit of meekness and humiliation. He bears calmly the insults and provocations which he is often called to endure, from a world which knows him not, because it knew not his Lord; and, instead of revenging every little injury, as if by his own power he could disarm the world of its hostility, he feels called upon to assume the attitude of one who is calmly waiting for, and expecting such manifestations of, the world's enmity, knowing, as he does, that because he is not of the world, therefore the world hateth him.

Two cases occur in the Word of God, in which this precise injury was sustained. The first to which we refer, is to be found in Acts xxiii. 1-3. "And

Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?” It may be observed here, that Paul, when thus obviously insulted in the very court of justice, makes his appeal to the law. And, from the conduct of the apostle in this case, we are plainly taught, that while the Word of God does not justify us in resisting evil, by resorting to individual and private revenge, we are not shut out as Christians from availing ourselves of those authorised means of protection which the laws of our country afford. To be a Christian is not to cease to be a citizen ; but even when availing ourselves of the rights of a citizen we must carry along with us the spirit of a Christian.

The second case of smiting on the cheek is recorded in John xviii. 22 and 23. “And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so ? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil ; but if well, why smitest thou me ?” This is the calm and dignified remonstrance of conscious innocence. We may vindicate ourselves with meekness when unjustly

treated; we may reason and remonstrate with the man who hath done us wrong, but the apostolic command must be our habitual rule of practice: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

From the two cases which we have thus adduced, we learn the true meaning of the general command, "Resist not evil;" also of the special instance, "Who-soever shall smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." Our Lord must not be understood as inculcating a tame, unresisting, pusillanimous submission to wrong without using means for our protection. He would have us to vindicate ourselves, but in a lawful way, and with a meek, humble, unoffending spirit. He would have us to ward off the blow, but not to retaliate, nay, rather, instead of giving way to private revenge, to prepare for the endurance of other and still severer injuries, by cultivating a spirit of deeper humility and more patient meekness.

And the same duty is enforced, still more strictly, in the *second* instance to which our Lord refers in illustration of his command that we resist not evil, an instance affecting the *property* of believers.

V. 40. "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Our Lord in this verse carries still further the ap-

plication of His principle, "Resist not evil." He had been speaking of its exercise in a case where the injury sustained might arise from the malice or mischievous caprice of the individual, but in the case here supposed, a believer is fraudulently deprived of his property under the show of justice. The injury has been sanctioned by the authority of the judges, and, therefore, the believer thus defrauded has no appeal but to Him that judgeth righteously. The injury sustained, it is true, is, as in the former case, slight and trivial, but still it is an injury which, when inflicted under the guise of legal forms, would call forth the resentment of the unrenewed man, and lead him to take private vengeance in retaliation for this public wrong. But this is not the spirit which the Redeemer would inculcate. He would wish us in such a case patiently to submit, and reverencing the lawful authorities as the ordinance of God, to surrender our property meekly into their hands at the bidding of the law, however unjust or unrighteous we might consider that law to be. We may use all proper means to obtain a change in the law, but as long as it stands unrepealed on the statute book, and is acted upon by the legal authorities, we owe it implicit submission, "giving to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's," with as conscientious alacrity as we "give to God the things that are God's." The law when it demands our property, demands what is strictly within its jurisdiction, and

if it shall sanction any man in fraudulently depriving us of our goods, we must not only, as Christians, patiently endure the wrong, but seek to cultivate a spirit so dead to the world, and to the things of the world, and at the same time so calmly submissive to the will of God, that we could be content to be entirely spoiled of our goods rather than by the indulgence of a sinful spirit of revenge to offend our heavenly Father. Let ours be the spirit of the martyr: "I can suffer, but I cannot sin."

The duty of non-resistance to evil by unwarranted private revenge, is enforced still further by a *third* instance affecting the *liberty* of the believer.

V. 41. "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

The application of the principle, "Resist not evil," reaches its highest point in this illustration. The injury in the first case was supposed to be inflicted by a private individual; in the second by the lawfully constituted judges of the land; but in this third case it is supposed to be inflicted by the highest civil authority, the sovereign himself. For the word "compel" here used, has reference to a custom of Persian origin, by which messengers despatched from the courts of eastern princes were authorized to press into their service men, horses, carriages, or whatever was necessary for the prosecution of the journey. Such compulsory re-

quirements on the part of royal messengers were often attended with peculiar hardship and inconvenience. But our Lord here teaches us that a cheerful, prompt obedience to the powers that be, even when their orders seriously infringe on our personal liberty, is a plain Christian duty. They are the lawfully constituted and authorised guardians of our persons, and our property, and our liberty, and even although in the exercise of a despotic authority they should trench upon our liberty to a certain extent, we are not to be so jealous of our rights as to count every infringement, however slight, an excuse for resisting the constituted authorities of the country. There is no doubt a point at which oppression will drive even a wise man mad, but the Christian will bear much before he will complain, far less rebel. It is not every act of injustice that will lead him to speak evil of dignities,—it is not every encroachment on his liberties or rights that will lead him to join the ranks of those who are given to change. By the subduing influence of the grace of God he has imbibed a quiet, patient, uncomplaining frame of mind. If at whatever inconvenience he is compelled to go a mile in obedience to the authorities who are appointed of God, he yields an unmurmuring acquiescence to what he considers as the will of his heavenly Father. Nay he will even gird himself for a longer journey and more self-denying sacrifice if he is called to it by

Him who is the King of kings, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. It may be that he may be driven to take up arms in defence of his violated rights and liberties, civil or religious, but this will be his last resource. Not until he has exhausted all other means of obtaining the redress of his grievances, until he has borne to the uttermost, and argued to the uttermost, and complained to the uttermost, and entreated to the uttermost, will he consent to oppose by open resistance, even that government which has lost all claim to be regarded as an ordinance of God, by showing itself to be a terror and a scourge, not to evil-doers, but to those that do well. When a man becomes a Christian, animated by the Spirit of the living God, he feels himself impelled to be a loyal, faithful, and obedient citizen and subject. His obedience to the civil authorities is cheerful, cordial and submissive. Personal insults he will patiently endure; to much injustice he will calmly submit; many hardships he will bear; all in obedience to his Saviour's command, "Resist not evil." But it were no difficult matter to establish from the Word of God, the lawfulness, as a last resort, of resistance to despotic rulers, who have abused their authority and forfeited all title to be considered as God's ordinance for good. On this subject the illustration of John Knox, in a conversation with Queen Mary, is beautifully apposite:—"Think you," said the Queen, "that

subjects, having the power, may resist their princes?" —“ If princes exceed their bounds, madam, no doubt they may be resisted, even by power. For no greater honour, or greater obedience, is to be given to kings and princes, than God has commanded to be given to father and mother. But the father may be struck with a frenzy, in which he would slay his children. Now, madam, if the children arise, join together, apprehend the father, take the sword from him, bind his hands, and keep him in prison till the frenzy be over, think you, madam, that the children do any wrong? Even so, madam, is it with princes that would murder the children of God that are subject unto them. Their blind zeal is nothing but a mad frenzy; therefore, to take the sword from them, to bind their hands, and to cast them into prison, till they be brought to a more sober mind, is no disobedience against princes, but just obedience, because it agreeth with the will of God.”

Thus, by these specific cases affecting the person, the property, the liberty of the Christian, does Jesus illustrate the duty of the Christian, “Resist not evil.” He must seek to banish from his mind those unhal- lowed dispositions which prompt to retaliation or private revenge. He must look beyond the earthly instruments by which the injury has been inflicted, to Him who has permitted and who guides them all, and feeling that all such evils are simply the scourge in

the hand of God for correcting His people, and training them to submission, it is his duty to maintain amid them all a calm and peaceful frame, saying from the heart, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good." "Shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil? Even so Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

The next verse seems to stand separate and apart from the others, and it might appear at first sight difficult to see any link of connection between the exhortation which it contains and what has gone before.

V. 42. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." It has sometimes been supposed, with a view to reconcile this passage with the verses we have just considered, that our Lord means to recommend to his people that, not contented with meekly enduring insults and injuries, they should exercise a kind and generous spirit even towards their enemies. This view, however, we are disposed to regard as more limited than the language of our Lord would warrant. His command is of a more unrestricted kind. Christian generosity is large and liberal. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," says Paul, speaking upon this subject, "that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be

rich." If we have known this grace in our blessed experience, we may not imitate our Lord so closely as to impoverish ourselves by our liberality, but we will come nearer to it than we do. A Christian is no niggard, because he feels that he is merely a steward of his wealth, and he remembers the searching question put by an apostle, "If any man see his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." This command is too unlimited say some; it will require to be guarded in some way, otherwise we will ruin ourselves by our generosity, and encourage improvidence and idleness among the poor. Jesus lays down this principle as the broad, expansive spirit of the gospel, and he leaves it to each man to make conscientiously those exceptions which will stand the scrutiny of a judgment day. Beware, however, of diluting, like the Scribes, God's pure and holy word; beware of frittering away by your cold and calculating limitations the all-embracing generosity of the gospel, a generosity which, unlike the selfishness of this cheerless world, seeks not its own but the things that are Jesus Christ's. If we have professed to give ourselves to Christ and yet withhold part of our possessions from Him we lie unto the Holy Ghost.

What a picture is here presented of the faithful

follower of the Lord Jesus! He is patient under injury, and charitable, considerate and kind to the poor. He shuts his eyes upon his own sufferings, and he opens them to drop many a tear over the sufferings of his fellow men. He can deny himself to many of the comforts of life, that he may have to give to him that needeth. The thought of this quickens his energies as he plies his daily task, and he relishes his morsel all the better if he has the privilege of sharing it with a needy brother. The grace of God has been bestowed upon him, and grace is a generous principle. Nothing opens the heart and the hand like grace. Under its influence a man gives himself unto the Lord, and having given himself, his property follows as a matter of course. "Lord I am thine," is his habitual acknowledgment, "and all that I have is thine."

CHAPTER III.

PERVERSION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF ALL LAW.

MAT. V. 43-48.

WE have now come to the climax and the conclusion of the faithful exposure which our Lord makes of the defective righteousness of the Scribes. He has already shown clearly and convincingly that they had perverted both the Moral and the Civil Law, and He now proceeds to establish, with equal clearness, that they had perverted the very principle of love itself—a principle which constitutes the foundation and the fulfilment of the whole law of God.

V. 43. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.”

No such command is to be found in the Sacred Scriptures. The passage to which Jesus most probably refers, as having been misinterpreted by the

Scribes, is to be found in Lev. xix. 18. "Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." There can be no doubt, that in this verse, strictly speaking, the word "neighbour" might be interpreted as referring to the Israelites, who are described in the first clause as "the children of thy people." But not contented with restricting the term "neighbour" to the Jewish nation, the Scribes drew from the command itself the unwarranted inference, that they were permitted, if not commanded, to hate all who were not of their own nation, and whom they were accustomed to consider as their enemies. And so extensively had this pernicious doctrine of the Scribes gained ground among the Jewish people, that by them the words *stranger* and *enemy* were considered as almost identical in meaning. Frequently in the course of His ministry, did our Lord seek to rectify their views upon this point. Thus, in the parable of the good Samaritan, He shows by a beautiful and affecting example, that it is our duty to shew benevolence and kindness to the stranger and the enemy. Nor did the Scribes receive countenance in their false notions from the law of Moses, although, undoubtedly, its precepts were chiefly directed to the welfare of the Jewish people. Thus, in Exod. xxiii. 4, 5, we find the command given, "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray,

thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him ; thou shalt surely help with him." And it is worthy of notice that when the same precept is recorded in fuller detail in Deut. xxii. 1-3, Moses exchanges the word "enemy" for that of "brother," thus plainly teaching the Israelites that it was their duty to regard even their enemies as brethren. The perverse doctrine of the Scribes, therefore, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy," was opposed to the whole spirit and genius of the Word of God.

Our Lord goes on accordingly to unfold the law of love in its true character and extent.

V. 44. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies ; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

The plain command of Christ is, that we love our enemies. This is a difficult and a high attainment. The love of the believer is a grace born from above. It flows from Him who is essentially love, and its purest and highest exercise is the love of God. But the question is asked by an apostle, "If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" We are thus taught that he who loves God, loves his Christian brother

also. The love, however, of which the Redeemer speaks, is of a different kind. It is not a love to one who is a partaker of like precious faith with ourselves, one whom we can love in the Lord, and whom we can recognize as bearing the Lord's image, a brother beloved. The love here referred to is a love to our enemies, a love which can break through all obstacles, all discouragements, all provocations, a love which flows forth even to those who hate us, who curse us, who despitefully use us and persecute us.

The love that animates the bosom of the child of God is of a twofold character. It is a love of benevolence which doeth good to all men as it hath opportunity, and a love of approving complacency which doeth good to those more especially who are of the household of faith. To all mankind, whether they be our countrymen or strangers, whether they be friends or foes, we owe a love of benevolence or good-will. If a man be our enemy, the duty of loving him becomes all the more difficult, and yet not the less binding. Love triumphs over difficulties, and the stronger the principle the more it is able to overcome.

The Redeemer, however, requires from us not only that we cherish a feeling of love to our enemies, but He demands an outward expression of the feeling, both in word and in deed. The three forms of exter-

nal manifestation of love to our enemies, as mentioned in the 44th verse, constitute an ascending series or climax ; 1st, blessing, "speaking well of" them that curse us ; 2d, "doing good" to them that hate us ; and, 3d, "praying for them that despitefully use us and persecute us." Each of these forms of love is so expressed, as to be in direct opposition to the various forms of hatred here enumerated.

The *first* mode in which enmity is often displayed towards the believer is by cursing. The angry feelings of the heart find vent in harsh, reproachful language, and even in bitter imprecations. What can be more unseemly, what more completely opposed to the Word of God, than such an exhibition of malicious and revengeful feeling ! We are commanded, by the benevolent Jesus, to meet a spirit of this kind by a directly opposite temper,—“Bless them that curse you.” The provocation may be great,—much grace may be necessary to subdue the risings of a wrathful spirit, yet the command is imperative. Let the world curse, the believer must bless. It is not only his duty to abstain from all unhallowed and vindictive language, but so subdued and sanctified will be his temper and disposition, if grace be in a lively condition, that instead of “rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing,” he will only render blessing ; knowing that he is thereunto called, that he should inherit a blessing. Thus it is that he will “overcome evil with

good," and exemplify the truth of the proverb, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." This is the dove-like simplicity and meekness of the true Christian.

The *second* form in which enmity towards the Christian manifests itself, is by deeds of hatred. Anger is seldom contented with mere words of bitterness; it not unfrequently displays itself in acts of unkindness, and even positive injustice. In such a case, our duty is thus laid down by the Lord himself, "Do good to them that hate you," a command which we find beautifully amplified by the Apostle Paul, Rom. xii. 20. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." This is the most effectual mode of overcoming an enemy. He becomes ashamed of his unkindness, and melted to tenderness by undeserved goodness.

The *last* and the strongest form in which hatred to the believer displays itself, is by spiteful treatment and open persecution. The feeling of enmity may have long been nourished in the breast of the ungodly man; he may have uttered towards the unoffending child of God many a bitter and unseemly word; he may have subjected him to many petty annoyances as an expression of his malignant disposition; but his enmity is now declared, and he grasps the sword of persecution to wound, and perhaps to murder the Christian. But if hatred has reached its height,

the believer's love must far transcend that height. "Pray for them," says Jesus, "that despitefully use you and persecute you." They can only, at the utmost, kill your body; but go to a throne of grace and plead for the life of their souls. This is a high Christian attainment, and we have various examples of it in the Word of God. This was the spirit which David displayed, Ps. xxxv. 11-13,—“False witnesses did rise up: they laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good, to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.” Stephen the martyr, before he expired, is represented to us as kneeling down and crying with a loud voice, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And Jesus also, as he hung upon the cross, exemplified his own command, when he prayed for his murderers in those words, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”

Thus are we plainly commanded, inwardly to cherish, and outwardly to express, both in word and in action, love even to our enemies. A love of this kind, however, is not natural to men. Where it exists in any degree whatever, it supposes that the soul has undergone a vital change. The individual thus loving has become a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is in this view that our Lord declares that

He has issued this command to all His followers,
“Love your enemies.”

V. 45. “That ye may be,” or show yourselves to be, “the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Mankind generally are sometimes spoken of in Scripture as the children of God ; for in one sense we are all His offspring ; but the expression in the instance before us bears a higher and a holier meaning. It refers only to those who have been redeemed to God by the blood of His Son, and who, though they once bore the image of the earthly, now bear the image of the heavenly Adam, the Lord from heaven. Love to our enemies is one of the most prominent features of this image. If we would be like God, we must love like God. His is no partial restricted love, “for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” This is God’s holy benevolence, wide as the universe He hath formed. He abhors, and He commands His people to abhor that which is evil ; but He makes a marked distinction between the sin and the sinner. The one He hates, the other He pities, protects and loves, and the same spirit animates all the true children of God. They have themselves experienced the power of Jehovah’s love, and therefore

theirs is often the exercise of David : “ mine eyes run down with tears, because men keep not thy law.” These tears are a most expressive evidence of their hatred of sin, and their pity and compassion for the poor infatuated sinner. Nor does their love to their fellow-sinners expend itself in mere unavailing feelings of compassion. They long, and strive, and pray that one and another may be brought out of the deep pit and the miry clay, and their feet planted upon a rock, even the rock of everlasting ages. Such feelings, and such actions, show clearly that the man within whose bosom such a love reigns, has become assimilated to the divine likeness. God is love, and no indignities or insults on the part of man have hitherto been capable of arresting in its progress that full tide of benevolence which hath with its fertilizing streams enriched the past, and will continue to enrich the future generations of mankind, even to the end of the world. The utmost extent of human guilt and ingratitude has never invalidated the truth of the declaration that “ God is love ”—a truth which is engraven as with a pen of iron on all the varied arrangements of nature’s operations, as well as on every page of man’s individual, domestic, and social history—a truth which the eternal councils of the Father, as far as they have been revealed, the obedience and expiatory death of the Son, and the mysterious operations of the Holy Spirit, fully and irrefragably attest.

If such then be the unquenchable nature, and the unlimited extent of the love of God, what a weight of responsibility rests upon the Christian if he would show himself to be the child of a Father so lovely, so loving! He must love even his enemies. His property may be invaded, his reputation may be tarnished, and every possible injury inflicted upon him, still it is his duty to bless, and curse not. What are all the offences that can be committed against the believer compared with the dishonour he feels that he has done to the character of God, and the rectitude of His government, by his multiplied and aggravated offences; yet how often does it happen that the slightest provocation rouses in us a spirit of revenge! And is not this spirit in fearful contrast with the long-suffering patience and forbearance of Jehovah towards us? But is it not still more opposed to the Almighty goodness which makes a free and unconditional offer of salvation to all who will accept of it! Men of the world may talk of their wounded honour demanding satisfaction, but with an example so transcendently beautiful before us, it is surely "the glory of a man to pass by a transgression."

The Christian occupies a more elevated and more responsible position than other men. His privileges and blessings are infinitely greater, his motives of action are far more powerful, and his future prospects indescribably more cheering. It ought not to astonish

us, therefore, if "the righteous be more excellent than his neighbour." Such, we might well suppose, would be the result of all the salvation that has been wrought out for him, and of all the grace that is working in him. To this natural expectation Jesus refers in

Vv. 46 and 47. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" To understand the force of this appeal we must bear in mind that there are two different kinds of love; there is a natural love, which is a constitutional feeling in the breast of every human being, and which is seen operating as an instinct even in the inferior animals; and there is a spiritual love which exists only as a heaven-born grace in the soul of the believer. Maintaining this important distinction between love as it exists in the hearts of all mankind, even of the unregenerate, and love as it is implanted in the soul of the Christian by the indwelling operation of the Spirit of God, the Redeemer thus argues: "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?" The word "reward" here is not to be taken in a legal sense, as if by the exercise of any Christian grace we could merit acceptance with God. The idea seems to be, what advantage can accrue to you above other men, a thought which is brought out in

a still more expanded form in the 47th verse : “ If ye salute,” as the outward expression of your love, “ your brethren only, what do ye more than others, do not even the publicans so ? ” The publicans or tax-gatherers, appointed by the Roman government to collect the taxes among the Jews, were accounted, and in many cases justly, the most infamous among the people. They were often notorious for their extortion and rapacity, destitute alike of conscientious principle and honourable feeling. Such men are here selected by our Lord as the representatives of all that is selfish, and worldly, and covetous in the earth ; the farthest removed, whatever might be their outward profession, from the enlarged, and loving, and liberal spirit of Christianity.

The argument, then, of the passage before us is simply this. Love, as a natural principle, exists and operates with greater or less strength in the mind of every man. Even the most depraved and abandoned cannot refrain from loving those that love them, or shewing kindness to those that shew kindness to them. Is this then, the Redeemer would ask of his professing people, the character and the extent of your love ? Has it no higher, no purer origin, has it no other, no more extended operation ? If so, what difference is there between you and the world ? Nay, what difference is there in this respect between you and the most depraved in the world ? You love your brethren

only; you love where there is something to attract your love, where it will meet with a response cordial and warm. This is nothing more than a mere natural affection, a broken fragment of that temple of love which once existed in the soul of man. But this is not the principle which Christ requires, and which the Spirit implants in every child of God. The love which actuates the believer is a love which, while it cordially rejoices in every responsive feeling on the part of a brother, can triumph over and trample down every opposing obstacle, " blessing those that cursed us, doing good to those that hate us, and praying for those that despitefully use us and persecute us." This is no mere natural affection. Pure and lovely like its great original, it knows no dwelling upon earth save in the bosom of the pious and humble Christian. He and he alone knows what the world can never understand, the constraining influence of the love of Christ, and under the operation of this powerful impelling motive, he loves as the world cannot love, with a purity, an intensity, a self-sacrificing disinterestedness which marks him out as a child of God, bearing obvious traces of his heavenly origin.

The law of God is the transcript of His image, and love is the fulfilling of the law. It forms, therefore, a natural and a beautiful and befitting close to the exhibition which the Redeemer has been giving of the law of love that He should tender the solemn exhortation:

V. 48. "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

It is to be observed, that the word "perfection," when used in reference to believers, has two different meanings. In one sense the believer is perfect the moment that he is justified. His sins are forgiven, his person is accepted, he is complete in Christ, so that he has a valid title to an inheritance in the heavens. In another sense the believer, while he remains in this world, is imperfect. The former refers to his condition, the latter refers to his character. The former refers to his title to heaven, the latter to his meetness for heaven. It is only in the latter sense plainly that any exhortation can be applicable. And hence we must consider this closing command of Christ as enforcing upon the children of God a closer assimilation to the image of God, more especially in the cultivation of "love which is the bond of perfectness," "for he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him."

The man who has been enabled by grace to love his enemy, is perfect in Christ Jesus. He is "washed and justified and sanctified," and he will "go on unto perfection." The image of God has been stamped upon his soul, and the features of that image will stand out every day in stronger and stronger relief. Some would be inclined to dilute the command, and to explain it as pointing simply to a comparative per-

fection. From this, however, we feel ourselves shut out by the very language of the verse, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as *your Father* which is in heaven is perfect." The image of God must be reflected from the child, and, accordingly, we find an analogous exhortation, 1 Peter i. 14, 15 and 16. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." The power of our Lord's appeal and that of the apostle rest on the same point, the close and intimate relationship which exists between the believer and God. "Be ye perfect," ye who are or profess to be the children of God, "even as your Father is perfect." He speaks of God as our Father in heaven that the Jews might not misunderstand Him as if He referred to Abraham, whom they were so accustomed to speak of as their earthly father. The verse then may be thus paraphrased in connection with what has gone before. If ye do love your enemies, and thus exhibit most convincing evidence that ye have been transformed into the image of God, and are become His children by a spiritual and new birth, seek to be made perfect in love, which is the perfection of the law's requirements, and the perfection of Jehovah's character.

PART SECOND.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF PHARISEES.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF PHARISEES.

MAT. VI. 1.

In commencing the second great division of the Sermon on the Mount, that which refers to the righteousness of the Pharisees, Jesus sets out with the important truth that the life of the Christian is a hidden life wrought in the very depths of the soul by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God. The religious life of an ancient Pharisee, or of a modern formalist, for in reality they are one and the same, consists only of the strict observance of outward forms, and that too, from no higher principle than to be seen of men. What a contrast then is there between the hypocrite and the Christian! The one is seen and applauded of men, the other is only discerned of God. The life of the believer is a secret, exclusive dealing with his God, and all his actions are done as unto God and not as

unto men. This is the peculiar characteristic of the life of God in the soul, and such is the importance which the Redeemer attaches to it, that He illustrates its operation in the case of three great Christian duties, almsgiving, prayer and fasting.

Accordingly the Redeemer sets out in this part of His discourse with issuing the solemn warning in reference to righteousness in general.

V. 1. "Take heed that ye do not your alms (marginal reading, righteousness,) before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven."

It may be observed that instead of the word here rendered "alms," many manuscripts read a word which may more properly be rendered "righteousness," and, accordingly, several commentators regard this verse as introductory to our Lord's remarks upon the three great Christian duties. Nor is it at all unlikely that in commencing a new division of the sermon He should have used the same word which He had employed in the passage that formed, in our opinion, the ground-work of the whole. Righteousness, or conformity to the law of God, was the subject of His discourse. He had shewn by various striking instances that its real nature was misrepresented in the teaching of the Scribes, and now that He is about to shew that it has been equally misrepresented in the

actual conduct of the Pharisees, what more natural than that He should commence with the warning, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven ?" There is no doubt, however, that the term "righteousness" is employed in a few passages in the sense of compassion or benevolence. Thus in 2 Cor. ix. 9, "As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad ; he hath given to the poor ; his righteousness remaineth for ever." But taking the word in its most extensive signification, as implying holiness or virtue, a signification so completely in harmony with the object of the sermon, this verse may be viewed as laying down an important caution in reference to the prevailing motive by which we ought to be regulated in the performance of even good actions. For while the doctrine has been often inculcated by writers on morals, that the character of an action depends upon the intention of the agent, there is some danger that, by the unlimited adoption of such a principle, we might give countenance to the maxim of the Romish Church, that the end sanctifies the means. It may be well, therefore, to remark, that while the intention may convert a good into a bad action, it cannot possibly convert a bad into a good action. Every act that a man does, must, in order to be a good action, be in accordance with the law of God. It must be a duty commanded by the great

Lawgiver, and not only so, but it must be done from a regard to the authority, and with a desire to promote the glory, of God. The righteousness or goodness of the Pharisees was of a very different character. Even their religious duties, actions in themselves good, were entirely vitiated, and converted into actions totally unacceptable in the sight of God, by the unhallowed nature of the ruling motive from which they were performed. They were done from no other, no higher motive than to be seen and applauded of men. This was the principle of action with an ancient Pharisee as it is with a modern formalist, even in the worship of his God. Hence it was regarded as an essential part of the action, that it should be done before men. Jesus had no doubt in this very discourse enjoined upon his people the important duty of openly avowing in their whole words and actions the high and holy principles by which they were actuated. "Let your light," says He, "so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And yet even in these very words now quoted, the perfect harmony and consistency of the two commands may be observed. The desire of the child of God is, that his works may be seen in order that his Father may be glorified. It is only, therefore, when he entertains a reasonable prospect that such will be the result of his actions that he will even seek to do them openly. The ultimate, the

only aim of the Pharisee on the other hand, is to be seen of men. His heart is set upon the honour that cometh from man and not upon that which cometh from God only.

To shew, therefore, the utter vanity and worthlessness of the desire of human applause as the ruling motive for the performance of actions in themselves good, Jesus anticipates the judgment-day, the day of final retribution. Man's actions will then be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. Every action, whether good or bad, will be traced back to its origin, to the secret spiritual motive from which it has sprung. And the Redeemer warns the Pharisee of the result of a righteousness which arose from no other motive than to be approved of men, "ye have no reward of your Father which is heaven." This was an explicit announcement from Him to whom all judgment hath been committed. "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." How solemn the warning then from His lips: "Take heed." He would urge upon every one to mark well the state of his heart, to scrutinize the motives from which even his good actions are performed, and, above all, to be often realizing the judgment-day.

Our Lord sets before His people, in this passage, the prospect of a future reward, and a reward dependent, in some way or other, on the character of their works. They are to beware of improper motives in

the performance of duty, otherwise they may miss their reward. The question then arises, What is the precise place which the doctrine of rewards occupies in the Christian system? Man has plainly forfeited all title to reward; nay, he has become liable to punishment; but we are taught in the sacred Scriptures, that a title to acceptance with God, and a reward from Him, have been purchased by Christ for all His people. The only right then which any man possesses to a reward, is founded on the imputation of Christ's righteousness to him, as the only righteousness which can possibly merit a reward. Still, no sooner has a believer's title to a reward been made good, on the ground of Christ's righteousness, than it becomes a question which the principles of eternal equity alone can determine—What is the amount of *the* reward which each individual believer shall receive? Hence these remarkable words, “God is not *unrighteous* to forget your work and labour of love.” “Thou renderest to every man according to his work.” Observe, it is not *on account of* his work: this were to make our works the ground of our title to an eternal inheritance. The doctrine of Scripture is, that we receive a reward, not *on account of* our works, but *according to* our works. Our works are not the ground on which we receive the reward, but they are the standard or measure according to which that reward is bestowed. Hence, in various passages, we find this doctrine distinctly held

forth—"He that giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple shall not lose his reward." His reward for what? Plainly for that individual action. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." In the heavenly firmament there are various degrees of splendour; for "one star differeth from another star in glory," and this glory is proportioned to the progress which believers have made in holiness during the course of their earthly career.

On these principles the warning of Jesus, in the verse before us, has a peculiar force. Every good work, every deed of righteousness must be done with diligence, with alacrity and zeal, and besides, the motive from which it flows must be carefully guarded; for an improper or unscriptural motive may vitiate even an otherwise good action; so vitiate it, that although it may receive the applause of men here, it may altogether miss its expected reward hereafter.

This doctrine is illustrated by our Lord, in the first instance, by a reference to the duty of almsgiving.

SECTION I.—ALMSGIVING,

MAT. VI. 2-4,

V. 2. "Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do

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not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Almsgiving is a duty which is frequently inculcated throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. We may select a few passages for the purpose of showing how much higher the position which this duty occupies in the Word of God, than it does in the estimation of many amongst ourselves. Deut. xv. 7-11, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand, from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy

land." Exod. xxii. 21-24, "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry: and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." In beautiful accordance with the spirit of such injunctions as these, the Israelites were commanded to leave the "forgotten sheaf" in the field in the time of harvest; not to "go over the boughs of the olive-tree a second time;" nor "twice glean the grapes of their vineyard;" but that what remained after the first gathering should be left for "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." David declares, Ps. xli. 1, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble;" and Solomon, to the same purpose, says, Prov. xix. 17, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." And passing to the New Testament, we find our blessed Redeemer testing the religion of the amiable young man who came to Him by the trying command, "Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor." The result showed that the living principle of Christianity was wanting: "He went away sorrowful, for he was very rich." In the same spirit John the Baptist commanded the

multitudes who followed him, professing a wish to be baptised of him, "He that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." Such is the generous spirit of the religion of Christ, and, accordingly, an apostle expressly teaches, 1 John iii. 17, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?" The Pharisees are not blamed by our Lord as having neglected this important Christian duty. They appear, on the contrary, to have abounded in it, but from no other motive than to be seen of men. They were wont to give their alms in the most public and ostentatious way ; and in using the words, "Do not sound a trumpet before thee," Jesus probably alludes to a custom which prevailed among men of wealth in Eastern countries, of summoning the poor by sound of trumpet to receive alms on a certain day. From a similar spirit of ostentation, the hypocritical Pharisees selected the synagogues and the streets as the most public places for the distribution of their alms ; and in doing so, their prevailing desire was to "have glory of men." Nor did they lose their reward : men saw, admired and applauded. So highly were the Scribes and the Pharisees esteemed, that it was a current saying among the Jews, that if only two men were to enter heaven, the one would be a Scribe and the other a

Pharisee. But what avails the approbation of men, if, in gaining it, we forfeit the approbation of the holy Jehovah? The fickle breath of popular applause will soon die away; but how refreshing the words which fall upon the ear of the believer as he enters the eternal inheritance, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Calling the believer away from resting on the applause of his fellow-man, who giveth up the ghost, and where is he? Jesus points him forward to the coming judgment, and urges him to be chiefly influenced by a desire to approve himself in the sight of God.

Vv. 3 and 4. "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly." Some duties are, from their very nature, public, and must therefore be performed before men; nay, in some circumstances, almsgiving itself may partake of this character, and thus come under the general rule given by our Lord to the Christian, "Let your light shine before men;" but cases of this kind are the exception, not the rule. Christian prudence and wisdom will enable the believer to discern when it is likely that his heavenly Father will be more glorified by public, than by secret almsgiving; but He who knows how feeble grace is in the child of God at the

best, is desirous to remove all obstacles out of his way, and to put him into a position the most favourable for the faithful and acceptable discharge of duty. Accordingly, His command in reference to alms-giving is, "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." So strong, so all-absorbing ought to be our anxiety to glorify our heavenly Father, that, far from seeking the praise of men, we should strive to hide the deed of charity even from ourselves, lest, "being puffed up, we should fall into the condemnation of the devil." This almost total unconsciousness of our own good deeds is a high attainment of the Christian, and indicates a lively acting of the Divine life in the soul. The movements of a living body are never more healthy than when they take place unconsciously; but the moment that any one of the functions attracts the notice of the individual, that moment is disease to be apprehended; and so it is with the actings of the spiritual life. The believer dwells in God, and if grace be matured, every thought, and word, and action, has a reference to Him. God is the pole-star by which the believer steers his course. He has reached the exactly opposite point from the unbeliever, for God is now in all his thoughts. He gives to the poor because God hath commanded him, and under the influence of that sanctified compassion which the Spirit of God hath wrought in his heart. He does it, therefore, in secret,

concealing the act as it were even from himself, that God may be honoured and his brother relieved. Not that we can possibly be unconscious of our own deeds, but the Redeemer uses this strong language to show how anxious he is to exclude every other motive but the right one—a desire to “please God as dear children.”

And while the believer thus deals exclusively and alone with his heavenly Father, even in acts of kindness and benevolence to his fellow-men, the Redeemer informs us that the day is coming when there will be an open recognition before an assembled universe of these secret acts of Christian sympathy and love. The cup of cold water which was given to refresh the parched lips of yonder humble, obscure believer, shall not lose its reward. In that solemn day when “the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest,” “the Father who seeth in secret shall reward His people openly.” He will acknowledge them as His own, clothed in the righteousness of His own Son, and sealed by His own Spirit, and every work of faith, and every labour of love, though hidden from the view of others and even of themselves, shall meet with its corresponding reward, and their’s shall be the welcome invitation, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

1. What a beautiful exhibition does this passage

afford of the ethics or morality of the New Testament. Philosophers have often inquired into the nature of virtue or moral goodness, and the conclusions at which they have arrived on this important subject have been various and conflicting. Some have taught that an action is virtuous when it is agreeable to the fitness of things; others when it is conformable to nature; others to reason, and others to truth, while in more recent times the doctrine has been extensively held that an action is virtuous only when it is useful. But the centre point of the morality taught by Jesus is God. His revealed will is the only standard of virtue, and its very nature consists in conformity to the will of God. But entering deeper still into the workings of moral principle, the Redeemer sets forth the important truth that even a good action may be vitiated by an improper motive, that though the action may be one which is expressly commanded by God, still if it is not done with a supreme desire to honour God it cannot be acceptable in His sight. And this ought to lead us,

2. To a strict inquiry as to the motive from which our actions habitually flow. Do we set God constantly before us, and live and act as in His sight, and in full view of the coming judgment? If not, then let us not deceive ourselves; we are strangers to the power of the Spirit's working in the heart. Every act, every impulse of the Spirit in the soul has a re-

ference to God. Pray to God then, reader, that you may be brought into such a state, that a desire to promote the divine glory will be the reigning, the all-impelling motive of your conduct. This will give a unity, a consistency, a harmony to your whole life, for "whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, you will do all to the glory of God."

SECTION II.—PRAYER.

MAT. VI. 5-8.

Jesus having shewn that the righteousness of the Pharisees was defective in so far as almsgiving is concerned, proceeds to the second great duty in which they abounded, the solemn and delightful duty of prayer.

V. 5. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

Prayer is viewed by the child of God as at once a duty, a privilege, a pleasure, and a benefit. Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. He lives by prayer; and no surer proof can any man give that he has not

yet been made alive unto God, than the habitual omission or the careless performance of this solemn duty. And how does the Lord himself prove to Ananias the reality of the conversion of Saul, but by this indication, Behold he prayeth. The first act of spiritual life is the prayer of faith, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." Prayer is well described as an "offering up of the desires of the heart," and it is not until a man has had spiritual desires implanted within him, that he will really pray. He may have often bowed the knee, he may have honoured God with his lips, but he has hitherto been far from God. And, accordingly, in the verse before us, the Redeemer draws an important distinction between true, acceptable prayer and the prayer of the hypocrite, which, as coming from a wicked heart, is an abomination in the sight of God. "Be not," says He, "as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." An exercise of this kind is destitute of the essential peculiarity of prayer, and the peculiarity, indeed, of all the operations of the Christian life; it is not an exclusive dealing with God. The hypocrite and the formalist love to perform their religious duties in the most public places and in the most open manner, because they have no higher aim than to be seen of men. When

the believer prays he stands afar off, as it were, from men, his eyes are towards heaven. And how is his heart engaged in that interesting moment? He feels his entire, his absolute dependence upon God; his desires are towards Him; his highest delight is in His presence, he is pouring out his heart before Him. The hypocrite desires the presence of man, that he may exhibit before him the apparent fervency of his devotions, but the Christian loves to be alone with his God. And our Lord to express the folly of the hypocrite's conduct uses these emphatic words, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." The Lord gives them their hearts' desire, but He gives it in wrath. Take heed, then, what is your chief aim in any religious duty. God must have the whole heart or He will have none of it. "He is a jealous God, and He will not give His glory to any other."

There is no occasion on which the hidden life of the believer manifests itself more strongly than in secret prayer. In public devotion the soul is liable to be somewhat disturbed by the presence of our fellow-men, so that we are to a certain extent prevented from that close collectedness of thought and unrestrained expression of our desires, which the believer feels to be essential to his growth in grace. Hence the urgency with which the Redeemer exhorts each individual believer to cultivate the habit of secret prayer, if he would keep alive and promote the

growth of the principle of grace which has been implanted within him.

V. 6. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

The words here used imply the utmost privacy and retirement, as entire seclusion from the world as our circumstances can possibly admit of. The spirit and practice of the Christian must be directly opposed to that of the hypocrite. He must withdraw from the world, and even from his dearest and most intimate friends, and converse with God alone. This will be the invariable effect of the grace of God in the soul. It will irresistibly lead him to abound in secret prayer, and the more powerful grace is, so much the more necessary will he feel secret prayer to be. He has wants which God alone can supply ; he has distresses which God alone can relieve ; he has sorrows amid which God alone can comfort him ; temptations from which God alone can deliver him. Without prayer his graces will decline, his faith will become feeble, his love will wax cold, his spiritual strength will decay, and in due time Ichabod will be inscribed upon his forehead, the glory is departed. Let me urge then upon every child of God to "pray without ceasing" "in every thing, by prayer and supplication,

with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." It has often been remarked that the first symptoms of spiritual decline commence in the closet. Be on your guard, therefore, believers, against a formal spirit in your secret devotions. Seek when you are with God to have the world shut out from your heart, and strive after a collected state of mind before you commence your approach to the footstool, so that you may be able to say, "My heart is fixed, O God." And for this purpose perhaps the most suitable employment in preparation for a close communion with God in secret, is to read a short portion of the Word of God, endeavouring to enter into its spirit, meditating seriously upon the truths which it contains, until the heart glows with devotional feeling. And the portion of God's Word which believers in all ages have most frequently delighted to use, for the purpose of bringing the mind, with the aid of the Spirit, into a frame most fitted for secret prayer, is the Psalms of David, which contain a mine of precious subjects wherewith the mind and the heart of the believer may be richly fraught in the devotions of the closet.

Not only does Christ inculcate upon his people the duty of secret prayer, but He issues His command in language which plainly conveys the idea of a privilege, "Pray to thy Father which is in secret." In the performance of alms-deeds the child of God was

reminded of his "Father who *seeth* in secret;" but to encourage him to the observance of secret devotion he is reminded of his "Father who *is* in secret." The believer is in his closet, the world is shut out, but even then he is "not alone, for his Father is with him." The communion of the child of God with his heavenly Father is not only a secret, hidden communion, but it is a near and intimate communion. The Israel of God are described "as a people near unto Him." They are admitted into His presence chamber, He converses with them as it were, face to face. He is not a mere observer of their secret devotions from His throne in the heavens, but He is present with them in their secret retirements, and He even permits them to wrestle with Him, until, like Jacob, as a prince they shall prevail.

And besides He who thus communes with them is their Father. They have received the spirit of adoption, whereby, with childlike confidence, mingled with holy reverence, they exclaim, Abba, Father. The sonship of the believer is that which gives him such enlargement of heart in his secret devotions. There is an unspeakable tenderness and ample encouragement in the revelation which God makes of Himself to His people as their Father. The whole blessings of the new covenant indeed may be summed up in the one promise: "I will be unto thee a Father." Throughout the Old Testament God is generally ex-

hibited under the sterner notion of a lawgiver, and although we find occasional glimpses of this endearing relationship, as in the passage of Isaiah, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting," yet it was reserved for New Testament times to bring out this view of God in a still stronger light than ever. Multitudes since the fall of man, and the revelation of mercy which followed, had been admitted into the adoption of children, but now that the kingdom of heaven was made manifest in its glory by the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, the doctrine that God is a Father to His people, is held pre-eminently forth to the world, and this Sermon being the introduction of the Kingdom, the name "Father" applied to God, is brought forward for the first time since the coming of Messiah, and it is used by our Lord in the course of the Sermon no fewer than fourteen different times.

The name Father, as applied to God, is peculiarly sweet and endearing. Which of us has not experienced the tenderness and soothing influences of an earthly father's love, and yet if the love of every father that ever lived upon the earth, were all concentrated in one bosom, it would be cold and unfriendly compared with the love of our Father in heaven to his ransomed people. How sweet then

to commune in secret prayer with a God of love, with a Father whose love infinitely transcends all that human imagination can conceive!

And farther, how is the child of God encouraged in his converse with his heavenly Father, when he reflects that all his infirmities and short-comings, all his unmortified corruptions, and unsanctified desires, which cost him many a pang of sorrow, and many a struggle for deliverance, will not finally shut him out from the love of God. "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." And as an expression of this pity, hear His own language, heavenly, affectionate and tender: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee." "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore are my bowels troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." If such, believer, so tender, so loving, so compassionate be thy Father which is in secret, are any arguments necessary to persuade thee to pray to Him? Dost thou not feel that there is enough in thy sonship to ensure thee a welcome reception at a throne of grace? It is thy Father with whom thou art secretly to hold fellowship. Reveal to Him the inmost secrets of thy heart, commune with him freely, fully, confi-

dentially. Let there be much in your secret devotions of the "Abba, Father."

But the encouragement which the Redeemer holds out to the believer to abound in secret prayer, is not yet exhausted, for he adds in the verse now under consideration, "Thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." There is a reward awaiting the praying Christian in the heavens, a reward of grace, not of debt; a reward which will amply compensate for the many trials of faith and patience which he has often experienced in his closet devotions. How true is it that the world knows not the people of God! It is utterly unacquainted with those painful and sometimes protracted struggles with an unbelieving heart; those mournings over unsanctified desires and unhallowed inclinations; those ardent aspirations and longings after more ample communications of the grace of God, which only He who seeth in secret can possibly know. But while the believer has his secret sorrows, he has also his secret joys, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle, and one of the sweetest and most abundant sources of true spiritual consolation is derived from the thought of the day of final recompense. That day so terrible to the impenitent and unbelieving, is looked forward to by the Christian as the consummation of his joys, for he knows that then he shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the presence of an assembled uni-

verse. Then it is that the believer who has sowed in tears shall reap in joy. The tears he has shed in secret have all been carefully preserved, for the Lord hath put them into his bottle; his secret devotions, unseen by human eye, or unheard by human ear, are all registered in the book of God's remembrance, and when, at last, the judgment shall be set and the books opened, the prayer of faith shall meet with its fullest answer, for he who hath prayed earnestly, and waited long, shall now be permitted to see the fruit of all his supplications and ardent longings in his enjoyment of those everlasting and inexhaustible pleasures which are at God's right hand.

Jesus next proceeds to notice a very erroneous notion connected with the subject of prayer, which has been found to prevail among unenlightened nations in all ages of the world. The notion now referred to, that the exercise of prayer is meritorious in itself, is strongly rebuked by our blessed Lord in vv. 7 and 8, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye, therefore, like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." We find a remarkable example of the practice here referred to in 1st Kings xviii. 25-29. "And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many: and call ye on

the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us ! But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud ; for he is a god : either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when mid-day was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." The word here translated " use not vain repetitions," is a very peculiar one, indicating empty words, unmeaning repetitions. All repetitions in prayer are not to be understood as discountenanced by the Saviour, for on some occasions they manifest simply an intense earnestness of spirit, as in the case of the Redeemer himself, when, in his agony in the garden, he retired to a little distance and prayed, using the same words. Neither are we to understand the Redeemer as discountenancing on every occasion long prayers. These also, as every experienced believer knows, are frequently an indication of the ardent long-

ings of the soul. The prayer offered up by Solomon at the dedication of the temple, is an instance of a long prayer on a special occasion; and it is remarkable, that He who dictated to the disciples the shortest and most comprehensive prayer which the Bible contains, is declared to have spent a whole night in secret, solitary prayer. When the believer is admitted into very close, confidential communication with his heavenly Father, and the flame of heaven-enkindled devotion burns with peculiar brightness, the moments glide swiftly away; and hours are found to have been spent in the closet, while the soul has been so enwrapped as to be unconscious of the passing of time. It is not to such protracted seasons of delightful converse with the Father of our spirits that Jesus refers. He reproveth "vain repetitions," and the foolish imagination that the acceptableness of prayer depends upon the number or the copiousness of its expressions. The sigh heaved from the bosom of a contrite one, which may never have found vent in words, is a powerful prayer. The silent tear which steals secretly down the cheek of the burdened sinner is an effectual prayer, which rends the heavens, and brings down the Spirit's influences in a copious flood upon the soul. It is not our much speaking, but our earnest longing, that will obtain an answer. It is the inwrought, fervent prayer of the righteous man,—the washed, and justified, and sanctified believer—that

availeth much. It enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. He receives it as the prayer of a chosen one, and He opens the windows of heaven and showers down copious blessings upon the longing, praying soul.

The arguments by which Jesus urges upon all believers to avoid the foolish practices and imaginations of the heathen in the matter of prayer, is very remarkable. "Be not ye, therefore, like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." It is interesting to notice that the Redeemer uses the very argument to encourage us in secret prayer, which the unbelieving world employs to do away with the necessity of prayer altogether. Why spend time in prayer, the infidel sometimes asks, when God knows our circumstances better than we do ourselves? An objection such as this is evidently founded on a total misconception of the real nature and design of prayer. It is not intended to impart information to the All-Wise, as if He were ignorant, but it has been enjoined by Him, who knows what we have need of before we ask Him; and He hath graciously promised to bestow blessings upon those who ask them in faith. No encouragement is given us to expect anything from Him if prayer is withheld. When He promises blessings He says, "For these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Such is the arrangement

which God hath made ; and how beautifully in accordance with the whole constitution of His providential government, whereby He hath connected means with their corresponding ends ! What better fitted to bring the soul to a proper sense of its dependence upon God, and to prepare it for the humble and thankful reception of blessings than the institution of the holy ordinance of prayer ?

One of the most refreshing and encouraging aspects in which the Hearer of prayer is represented is that which this passage contains. He is our Father, and will He not listen to the prayers of His own child, feeble and erring though that child may be ? He is our Father, and will He not pity us in our distress, and stretch out His hand to relieve us ? He is our Father, and will He not readily bestow all that His child requires ? And what additional encouragement may be derived from the thought that He knows minutely what we have need of before we ask Him ! Well may the child of God ask in faith, nothing doubting. We cannot reveal to God a single circumstance in our condition which He does not know, and for which He has not provided. Come, then, believer, enter into thy closet, and spread out before thy Father all thy wants, all thy sorrows, all thy temptations.

But how melancholy the condition of the man who is a stranger to secret prayer ! Let him not profane

the honourable name of Christian by assuming it. A prayerless Christian is an anomaly which exists not in the creation of God. Thou art not a Christian, but a Christless one; thou art without God and without Christ, and therefore without hope in the world. Ah! ye poor, prayerless ones, ye know not what ye do. You are setting at nought one of the sweetest enjoyments, one of the most precious blessings which fall to the lot of sinful man. If a father's presence and society be so delightful to the loving and affectionate child, O how much more refreshing is the presence of our Father in heaven! And yet this is a joy to which multitudes are strangers. What prevents you from the enjoyment of fellowship with a reconciled Father? Are you afraid that such has been your waywardness and rebellion He is unwilling to receive you? Are you anxious to return? Behold that loving Father running to meet you. He is waiting to be gracious; O that you were waiting to receive this grace.

SECTION III.—PRAYER—LORD'S PRAYER.

MAT. VI. 9, 10.

Our blessed Lord in pointing out to His hearers the true nature of the life of God in the soul, sets forth one grand peculiarity of it, that it is a secret walk

with God ; and this essential characteristic He contrasts with the religious life of the Pharisees, open, public and ostentatious, adopting as illustrations the very duties, alms-giving, prayer, and fasting, to which that sect of the Jews were most scrupulously attentive. In regard to the solemn and important duty of prayer, the Redeemer shows, that though public or social prayer is undoubtedly incumbent upon Christians, still, from the very nature of the exercise, prayer is a secret dealing with God ; and, therefore, closet devotion will ever form a most blessed and delightful employment of the true child of God. He will feel it to be a privilege and a pleasure, a duty and a delight to be often alone with God. Jesus takes occasion also to warn His disciples against some false conceptions and foolish practices which have in all ages been too extensively prevalent on the subject of prayer. And, in order fully to explain and enforce the views which He was engaged in impressing upon His followers, He presents them with a model of prayer, short, beautiful and comprehensive, which is commonly known by the name of the Lord's Prayer, introducing it in these words :—

V. 9. “ After this manner therefore pray ye.”

It has been much disputed whether this prayer is to be regarded as a form which the Redeemer meant that His people should regularly use in their devotions,

both public and private ; or if it is only to be understood as a model or pattern which might serve to guide believers in regard both to the matter and the manner of their prayers. The words here used, "*After this manner pray ye,*" might at first sight be thought to indicate that it was simply a pattern for our imitation, but the corresponding word in the original implies no more than "thus," a rendering which might plainly be considered as supporting either the one side or the other of this disputed question. When, on another occasion, as recorded by the evangelist Luke, Jesus, in answer to the entreaty of his disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray," repeated the substance, not the precise words of the prayer before us, he introduced it thus, "When ye pray, say," which seems to be an injunction to use the very words of the prayer. But it is surely no slight objection against the opinion that the Lord's Prayer was designed to be a form of perpetual use in the Church, that, when we compare the two Evangelists who have recorded it, we find several variations in the words ; and in Luke, the doxology, or conclusion, is omitted altogether. Had the disciples recognised as incumbent upon them the use of this prayer in its precise words, is it not strange, that although we find in the New Testament several prayers which were offered up by them after our Lord's ascension, this particular prayer seems on not a single occasion to have been employed by them ;

nor, indeed, is there any proof in the history of the Church, that this prayer was used as a form until the third century.

Viewing the Lord's Prayer in connection with the context, it appears to be the obvious design of our blessed Redeemer to teach His people to pray in the Spirit. There is no express reference to the work and the name of Christ. Jesus was now exhibiting for the first time, clearly and without a figure, the true nature and design of the kingdom of God. But the facts in the providence of God on which the kingdom rested, the events in the history of the Redeemer which were yet to happen, and which were to be evolved by the free agency of man, He refrains from explaining. The great doctrines, however, as to the work of Christ, and the efficacy of His atonement, are contained in this prayer by implication, though not directly. The one grand idea to which the whole prayer tends is, the ardent longing of the believer for the coming of the kingdom of God. This thought runs through the whole prayer, from its preface to its conclusion, just as the unfolding of the nature of the kingdom runs through the whole of this sublime Sermon on the Mount. The Lord's Prayer then, viewed in this aspect, may be divided into two parts, the one referring to the relation of God to man, and the other of man to God. The one portion of the prayer breathes a wish that God Himself would establish His

kingdom in the hearts of men, and the other breathes a wish that all the obstacles to the establishment of this kingdom in the hearts of men, may be removed ; while the conclusion expresses a firm hope and belief founded on the nature of God, that the prayer will be heard and answered.

The *first* part of the prayer, consisting of the preface and the first three petitions, will occupy our attention in the present section. The preface is contained in these words,—“ Our Father which art in heaven.” This beautiful, interesting and endearing appellation of God—“ Our Father,” is used for the first time in the New Testament age in the present sermon of our Lord ; and to point it out to us as in the full extent of its meaning characteristic of the dispensation of grace He embraces many opportunities of employing it, as that epithet which would best express the relation in which God stands to all His believing people, and teaches them to use it in their approaches to a throne of grace. In one sense God is the Father of the whole human family. “ He made us and not we ourselves.” “ He is the Father of our spirits” and “ the former of our bodies.” “ Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us.” And in His providential dealings He hath acted towards us as a Father. He hath supplied our daily returning wants, and watched over us with more than a father’s care and kindness. But it is not until we

have been born from above, regenerated by the Holy Ghost, that we can cry to God, as his spiritual children—"Our Father." By nature all believers are children of the wicked one—children of wrath even as others. But when, through Christ, the sentence of God's wrath hath been for ever cancelled, and we are redeemed unto God by the blood of His Son, it is then that we become the children of God in deed and in truth, and are constituted heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. How heinous the sin of those who refuse to acknowledge God as their Father! "Do ye thus requite the Lord? O foolish people and unwise! Is He not thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath He not made thee and established thee?" But on the contrary how blessed the privilege of those who can say in the spirit of adoption "Our Father." "Behold what manner of love is this, that we should be called the children of God." How deep the reverence, and yet how lively the confidence with which we ought to approach our reconciled Father! Seek, believer, to be delivered more and more from the spirit of bondage, which is unto fear, and to be brought increasingly under the power of the spirit of adoption, whereby you may be enabled to cry "Abba, Father."

In this prayer the people of God are viewed as one family, and the expression put into their mouths by the Redeemer—"Our Father"—is one which shews a sense of this unity of interest and feeling. They are

members of Christ and members one of another. The prayer of the believer consists no less of a communion with God than of a communion with the saints of God. The wants which he feels are the wants common to the whole family; the sins which he confesses are those under which they all groan; the desires which he breathes are those which they all feel. Social prayer, therefore, is to every Christian a delightful exercise. He feels that in approaching with his brethren to the mercy-seat his heart is knit to them by a stronger and a tenderer tie. And how sweet the promise, which may well cheer the heart of every member of our little praying circles: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Believers are also called upon in the preface to the Lord's prayer to address God as "Our Father *which art in heaven.*" "Heaven is his throne," it is said, "the earth is His footstool." The use of such an expression is, no doubt, designed to impress our minds with the thought that He is removed at an infinite distance from us, and, therefore, our hearts ought to be affected with the deepest solemnity and holy awe when we come into His presence. He is our Father not on earth but in heaven; and, accordingly, we are warned: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and

let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God ; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few."

The *first* petition of our Lord's Prayer is couched in these words, "Hallowed be thy name." The word name is here used for God Himself in all His fulness ; and hallowing this name, or sanctifying or glorifying it, implies here, not the desire that the name of God may be made holy, for it is infinitely holy, but that its holiness may be made manifest ; or, in other words, that He may appear before the whole created universe to be a God infinitely glorious and holy ; so that all may be prepared to join in exclaiming "Holy and reverend is His name." The position which this petition holds in the very commencement of the prayer is singularly beautiful and appropriate. It ought to be the first and the highest wish of the believer that God may be glorified ; and this petition we know will assuredly be answered. No sooner had Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify thy name," than there came a voice from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The highest motive in the mind of God, indeed, is the manifestation of His own glory. He displays it in the works of creation, for "the heavens declare His glory, and the firmament sheweth forth His handiworks." He displays it in the workings of His providence, and more especially in the mystery of His grace.

“ I will be sanctified,” says He, “ in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.”

When we adopt such a prayer, therefore, we must be understood as imploring that we ourselves may be enabled to hallow the name of God, or “ to glorify Him in all things whereby he maketh Himself known.” We glorify God when we reverence His name, stand in awe of His majesty, and tremble at His word; when we diligently and devoutly wait upon God in His ordinances, seeking to have fellowship with Him, and to receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls; but more especially do we glorify God when we close with the overtures of mercy, and become partakers of the sure mercies of David. Then it is that we hallow the name of our redeeming God, by shewing forth His praise with our lips, and by our lives. It is in and by His people that God is chiefly glorified. They delight in thinking that they owe all to the riches and glory of His grace, and it is their habitual and earnest desire that they may be enabled to render unto Him the glory due unto His name.

It must not be supposed, however, that in using the language in prayer, “ Hallowed be thy name,” we mean simply to ask that we ourselves may be disposed and enabled to hallow or glorify it. The petition has obviously a much wider and more extensive signification. It implies a prayer that the name of God may

he hallowed, honoured or glorified by all His intelligent creatures; that the whole earth may be filled with His glory; that kings may bow down before Him, and that all nations may serve Him.

That the object of this petition may be accomplished, it is plain that God must exercise His providential government in arranging all things for His own glory. He has all things at His disposal, and the hearts of all men in His hands. He can bring a revenue of glory to Himself out of the evil devices of the wicked, as well as out of the faithful services of the righteous. His vessels of wrath and His vessels of mercy both redound to his glory. "He is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works." What a fulness, then, is there in this petition, "Hallowed be thy name!" It points to the divine glory as the great end of all the arrangements of God, and it implies an earnest desire that this glory may be advanced both by ourselves and others. The implantation of this desire is the establishment of the kingdom of God in the soul. For what is the great end of the Christian's actings: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." But before such a desire can arise, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ must shine into our hearts. It is in the spiritual world, in this respect, as it is in the natural. The sun must shine upon an object before it can reflect light, and the Sun of Righteousness must shed His ef-

fulgent glory upon the believer's heart before he can give forth one ray of heavenly light to refresh and to illuminate this benighted world. To pray, therefore, that God's name may be hallowed, is to pray that His glory may shine into our hearts, and be reflected from our lives.

The *second* petition of the Lord's Prayer is expressed in these few words, pregnant with meaning, "Thy kingdom come." Our Father to whom we pray is a king, and as such He is frequently represented throughout the sacred volume. His kingdom is of a twofold character: 1st, His essential or general kingdom extending over universal nature. In this sense "His kingdom ruleth over all." It extends from the meanest reptile that crawls upon the surface of the earth, up to the highest archangel that stands beside the throne of God. But when we pray, "Thy kingdom come," it is plainly impossible that the essential kingdom of God can be meant, since it never can be more widely diffused than it is at this moment. But we remark, 2d, That God has a special kingdom which He exercises over His Church and people. It is to this kingdom that Jesus refers throughout His Sermon on the Mount, and it is for the coming of this kingdom that He teaches His people to pray. It had been prophesied by Daniel more than five hundred years before, that such a kingdom would be established by the Messiah, Daniel

vii. 13, 14: "I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." And when Christ appeared He commenced His public ministry by explaining the nature of this kingdom, as a reign over the hearts, and consciences, and lives of His people—a kingdom which was righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It was a very prevalent mistake among the Jews, and one to which even the apostles clung until the clearer light of the day of Pentecost shone upon their souls, that Christ meant to establish a temporal kingdom upon the earth, but even in the face of such mistakes and misapprehensions our Lord plainly avowed in the judgment-hall of Pilate when asked, "Art thou a king then? To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." The very words of the petition we are now considering were frequently used by the Jews in Old Testament times with no other reference than to the coming of the Messiah; but now that Christ hath indeed come, He commands His people to offer up this prayer with a view to the destruction of the usurped authority

which Satan hath so long maintained in the world, and the establishment of a kingdom in the hearts of His believing people, which begun in grace should end in glory.

Christ hath established to Himself a kingdom on the earth, consisting of all who profess to believe on His name. This is His outward visible Church over which He rules as its supreme and only head. But the kingdom of grace, to which this petition more especially refers, includes not professors, but only actual believers in Christ, who have been brought out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and in using the language, "Thy kingdom come," we pray that the number of actual believers may be increased, the kingdom of grace advanced, ourselves and others brought into it by the effectual operation of the Holy Ghost, and kept in it by the communications of constant supplies of grace out of the fulness that is in Christ, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened by the removal of every obstacle to the entrance of individual believers on the heavenly inheritance, and, finally, that Christ may speedily come the second time, to be glorified in His saints and admired of all them that believe.

Who can be expected to enter into the spirit of such a petition as this, except the man who has himself submitted to the sceptre of Christ, and become a subject of the kingdom of grace? Christ will always

maintain to Himself a kingdom upon the earth, and blessed are they that own His authority as their only King and Lord. He reigns, and He must reign till all His enemies are put under his feet. "Kiss the Son, then, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

The *third* petition of this remarkable prayer is expressed in these words, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." The will of God, like His kingdom, is of a twofold character,—*secret* and *revealed*. His secret will is that by which He is Himself regulated in the arrangements of His providential government; and His revealed will is that by which He desires that all men should be regulated. It is to the revealed or preceptive will chiefly that this petition refers. His will is done perfectly in heaven, for the glorified saints "serve Him day and night in His temple," and the holy angels "do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." We cannot equal the inhabitants of heaven in the perfection of their obedience; but though we may be incapable of reaching its extent in this world, still we may imitate some of the qualities of their obedience—its humility, cordiality, faithfulness, diligence and zeal, and, besides, we may strive after perfection.

This petition is intimately connected with the second. Every true subject of Christ's kingdom is de-

sirous of knowing and obeying the will of God. The first exclamation of the man who is born from above is, "What wilt thou have me to do?" The Word of God becomes "a light unto his feet and a lamp unto his path," and the Spirit of God works in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure. But the petition, "Thy will be done," expresses not only a desire to obey the revealed will, but also a desire to submit to the secret, providential, purposing will of God. The will of God, in so far as man is concerned, involves both doing and suffering; and although the angels that never sinned cannot be patterns of suffering, yet there are inhabitants of heaven concerning whom we are expressly informed, that they have passed through great tribulation before they entered the kingdom of God. In regard to all the dispensations of Providence, whether prosperous or seemingly adverse, we ought ever to pray "Thy will be done."

In offering up this petition, however, we must have a reference to others as well as to ourselves, and, therefore, we must be understood as praying that men may universally be brought to do the will of God with a promptitude and a cheerfulness such as are manifested by the angels in heaven.

Thus have we endeavoured rapidly to sketch the true nature and meaning of the first part of this invaluable prayer. It might be easily shown to be in beautiful harmony with the whole scope of the ser-

mon, breathing as it does an earnest desire that God may be glorified, and His kingdom established on the earth.

But we cannot close this section without putting to each individual reader the solemn inquiry, Has this kingdom come into your own soul? Have you been made willing in the day of the Redeemer's power? Are you seeking at once to know and to do His will, or are you of the number of those who know His will and do it not? "This is the will of God that we believe on Him whom He hath sent." Have you complied on this essential and all-important point with the will of God? If not, let it be your earnest prayer and your unceasing endeavour in the diligent use of all the means of grace, that you may be subdued under the power of Christ.

And let those who have been enabled to accept the invitations of His grace bear constantly in mind, that "this is the will of God, even our sanctification." He wills His people to be a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

SECTION 4.—PRAYER—LORD'S PRAYER CONCLUDED.

MAT. VI. 11-13.

The Lord's prayer, as we have seen, may be divid-

ed into two parts, the first referring to the relation which God holds to us, and the second referring to the relation which we hold to God.

It is the *second* part which forms the subject of our present exposition. The believer has, in the first three petitions, been breathing forth an earnest desire that the kingdom of God may come, that the reign of grace and of righteousness may be established in his own soul and in the souls of all mankind; and now he proceeds to pray that all the hindrances to the coming of that kingdom may be removed. The *fourth* petition of this beautiful prayer is expressed in these words, "give us this day our daily bread." This evidently refers to our temporal affairs, the means of our worldly support. The word *bread* being spoken of in scripture as the staff of life, and being the principal article of food, is here used for food in general, implying all needful support for our bodies. You observe we are commanded so to frame our prayers in reference to the good things of this life, as to express the utmost moderation in our requirements. "Dost thou seek great things for thyself? Seek them not." "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out," and it is, therefore, an incumbent duty, as well as essential to our true comfort, that, "having food and raiment we should therewith be content." It is undoubtedly true that every child of God will combine diligence in his worldly calling

with fervency in his supplications at a throne of grace, and it is equally true, that amid all his unwearied activity in the labours of honest industry, he will ever view himself as an humble pensioner on the bounty of heaven. "Give us." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." And how does it sweeten all the enjoyments of life when they are received as if they had come down directly from the hand of God. The homeliest meal partaken of in this way has a rich blessing with it. We are thus recognizing the source whence all our mercies flow, and honouring Him who, whether in temporal or in spiritual matters, "giveth the increase."

And this petition, further, is limited to what is sufficient for our present subsistence, "give us this day our daily bread." We are not authorised in asking of God that He would give us a large store of worldly blessings, but the very language of this prayer goes upon the supposition that prayer is as necessary as our daily food. We must come to God every day imploring Him to bestow what is sufficient for that day, and it is as needful that we should ask God to give, as it is needful to work that we may earn support. And yet, what a melancholy separation do we too often make between prayer to God and industry in our worldly calling. How would we

account otherwise of a man, but as a madman, who, though unprovided with the subsistence necessary for his body, should nevertheless refuse to work, expecting in some way or other to obtain food ; but infinitely more foolish is the man who never bows the knee to that God who alone can prosper his labours to obtain even a moderate portion of the good things of this life. The position which this petition occupies in our Lord's prayer is well worthy of being noticed. It stands alone in the middle of the prayer, the only petition which has any reference whatever to temporal matters. And it is only, as it were, a passing word upon the subject, expressing the simplest and the most moderate requirements. It breathes eminently the spirit of Agur's prayer : "Two things have I required of thee ; deny me them not before I die : Remove far from me vanity and lies ; give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me : Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord ? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." And yet, however moderate the single petition which the Lord's prayer contains for temporal support, the believer hurries onward, as it were, to those spiritual desires which are engrossing his soul. He seeks first and above all things the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that which is the first object of his anxiety is also the last. It is only in passing that he has a word to say about

his earthly subsistence. What a lesson is this ! God must be our all in all. "One thing," and only one "is needful" for immortal beings like us, and it is "that better portion which shall never be taken from us."

Impressed, indeed, ought the child of God to be with this solemn truth, that even in using the petition before us, he should beware of limiting his desires to the bread that perisheth. A temptation of this nature was set before Christ, but he repelled it with these words, "Man liveth not by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And although no doubt this petition in its fundamental meaning refers to earthly bread, yet it is alike our duty and our privilege to rise in our affections and desires to that "bread of life of which they who eat shall never hunger." This is the spiritual meat which has been provided for the people of God as they pass through the wilderness of this world ; and, like the ancient Israelites, they must gather this food daily. No store has been laid up from which, independently of prayer, they can draw at will. They must go daily to God for those supplies of spiritual nourishment which they so much need. "Give us this day our daily bread." Should their heavenly Father withhold the communications of His grace, their spiritual affections would become cold and languid, their spiritual graces would decline, and their spiritual health would wither and decay. If, therefore, their desires

daily rise towards God for sustenance to maintain the life of their frail, dying bodies, far more earnest ought to be their desires for the nourishment necessary to maintain the life of their souls.

The *fifth* petition of this sublime prayer runs thus : “ And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” In using this petition, we pray for the forgiveness of sin. Our debts are our sins ; we are debtors to the Almighty ; we owe Him an incalculable amount of obedience which we have failed to render. So enormous is the amount of our transgressions in the sight of a holy God, that it is represented by our blessed Lord, in the parable of the unmerciful servant, as a debt of ten thousand talents, or more than two millions and a half of our money, a sum which, from its vastness, is strikingly descriptive of those innumerable offences which we have committed against God. Not a thought, not a word, not an action but is mingled with sin. What a fearful computation then must that be, which reckons up the countless number of thoughts and feelings, of words and actions, which go to compose the melancholy history of every individual of our fallen and guilty race ! “ Who can understand his errors ?” We are debtors to the Almighty, and our debts transcend all human calculation. What then shall we do ? Our debts must be paid, and though the mercy of God might wish to cancel them, His justice forbids it. But Jesus hath paid the debts of all His people

in full. "He hath taken away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

In ourselves, we are altogether unable to discharge our debts, but we are invited to cast ourselves unreservedly upon the mercy of God, which, now blessed be His name, reigns through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and, to adopt the language which the Redeemer Himself hath put into our mouths, "forgive us our debts." This petition, then, plainly implies on the part of the suppliant, a penitential confession of guilt. But the question has sometimes been asked, How can the believer adopt such a prayer, having already experienced the forgiving mercy of God? To this it may be replied, that while the child of God has undoubtedly, in the act of his justification, received a legal pardon or deliverance from the law in its curse, he is nevertheless, in consequence of the inherent corruption of his nature, constantly offending against God, and requiring to obtain fatherly pardon, or the removal of those chastisements by which a righteous and loving father sees it needful to punish His erring children. This prayer then, while it is the prayer of a believer who has been freely forgiven all his sins, is the prayer also of one who feels that he needs the pardon of his daily offences.

And it is, probably, in accordance with this view of the subject that we find the qualifying clause appended to the petition, "as we forgive our debtors." It

must not be supposed for a moment that this is either a condition or a measure of the divine forgiveness. It is not a condition, for scripture plainly teaches that we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Nor is it a measure of the extent of God's forgiving mercy; for while no act of forgiveness on the part of man can be full, unreserved, and complete, God "blotteth out the transgressions of His people, and will not remember their sins." The explanation of the clause as given by our Shorter Catechism, appears beautifully correct. "We pray that God for Christ's sake would freely pardon all our sins, which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by His grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others." No better evidence can be adduced that we have been forgiven of God, than if the Spirit hath wrought in us a forgiving disposition. When we are conscious of being animated by this temper of mind, we have all the greater confidence in expecting mercy from our heavenly Father.

The *sixth* and closing petition of the prayer is intimately connected with that which we have now considered. It is expressed in these words: "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The word temptation is used in scripture in two different senses. Sometimes it denotes trials, whether of faith or patience, as when it is said, "God tempted Abraham," and the apostle James says, "count it all

joy when ye fall into divers temptations." In many instances, however, as in our text, it is employed to express allurements to sin. In this sense the apostle James declares, "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." Temptation to sin then does not come from God, who cannot be the author of sin. It comes from our own wicked hearts; from the influence of an evil world, and the craft of the enemy of souls. But while God tempteth no man in the sense of leading him into sin, He may, and often does in His inscrutable providence, permit the believer to fall into the hands of the enemy, or to walk for a time after the desires of his own heart. How necessary is it, then, that under a deep sense of our weakness and liability to err, we should offer up the earnest petition, "lead us not into temptation?" We are addressing the God of providence, in whose hand all the arrangements of the universe are, and in this petition we are asking of Him so to dispose of all the circumstances of our lot, that if it be consistent with His holy will we may not be permitted to fall into temptation.

The latter clause of the petition, however, supposes that for the accomplishment of His own all-wise purposes He may see it meet to leave us for a season

in the hands of the devil, for the passage may perhaps more properly be rendered "deliver us from the Evil One." He, therefore, is represented as "a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour;" and if we are incessantly exposed to his secret stratagems, or his direct assaults, how urgent ought we to be in offering up this petition, encouraged by the declaration of the Apostle, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it?" In offering up the petition, "deliver us from the Evil One," we are simply adopting the prayer of our great High Priest, now within the veil, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the Evil One."

The conclusion or doxology of the Lord's prayer is couched in these words, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen." This is an ascription of praise to God approaching in language to 1 Chron. xxix. 11, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all." We must consider these closing words of the prayer, as not simply an expression of admiration, but a series of arguments used with God on the ground of

which we expect to receive an answer to our prayers. His is the kingdom, and therefore we are encouraged to believe, that as the sovereign of the universe He will so arrange its affairs as to bring about the establishment of His kingdom of grace in this world, and that He will take to Himself His great power and reign upon the earth. His is the power, and with Him, therefore, all things are possible. He is able to overcome all opposition, and to fulfil the highest expectations and desires of His people. His is the glory, and therefore we may rest assured that He is ready to manifest that glory in the hearing and answering of this prayer, a prayer which involves in the highest sense the establishment of His kingdom, the exercise of His power, and the display of His glory.

The Lord's prayer finally closes with the solemn Amen, a word which denotes that we earnestly look for the answer of our prayer, *so let it be*; and that we firmly believe that it shall in God's good time be answered, *so shall it be*.

Such is a rapid view of that solemn and emphatic prayer which Christ hath left on record for the use of all his disciples. It is an admirable guide in all our devotions, both public and private, a model of prayer at once simple, beautiful, and sublime.

Having ended the prayer, the Redeemer returns to expound an important thought which had occurred in the course of it. To the fifth petition he had ap-

pended the clause, "as we forgive our debtors," and He adds, to explain, and further to impress the intimate and invariable connection between the reception of God's forgiving mercy, and the exercise on our part of a forgiving disposition towards our fellow men :

Vv. 14 and 15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This sentiment is expressed with perhaps additional power by Mark xi. 25 and 26, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any ; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." The duty here inculcated is one to which our Lord gives a very prominent place throughout the whole of his Sermon on the Mount. In the passage before us, it is exhibited both in a positive and in a negative form, namely, that a forgiving disposition is connected with pardon, and an unforgiving disposition with condemnation. We must beware, however, of imagining that our blessed Lord meant to teach that forgiveness shown to man is a meritorious act which deserves forgiveness from God. No such doctrine is taught in the Bible. We can do no truly

meritorious acts. To the merits of Christ alone we are indebted for pardon, acceptance, and every blessing. "By grace we are saved, through faith" in the Lord Jesus. And this salvation is complete in all its parts. It is a salvation at once from the guilt and the punishment, and the power of sin. It includes the pardon of all our sins, and it includes also the reception of a new heart. These two blessings are inseparable, and the existence of the one is a sure evidence of the existence of the other. If a man is truly forgiven of God, he is brought under the power of an endless life, and one of the most prominent fruits of the Spirit will be, a long-suffering, meek, gentle, placable disposition. "For the wisdom that cometh from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle, patient toward all men." "Charity suffereth long, and is kind, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." A disposition of this nature is a portion of the image of Him that created us, that image which He stamps anew on the souls of all His people. The grace of love can animate no bosom save that in which dwells the God of love, and the love which can forgive the injuries of our fellow-men, and freely, fully, frankly return their injuries with kindness, such

a love as this can only spring from the extension of God's forgiving mercy to our own souls. If we feel that we have been forgiven much, it is surely a natural return that we should love much ; and how can we better manifest our love to a forgiving God, than by seeking—O how faintly!—to resemble Him in this feature of His character. Thus shall we most effectually show that we know something of the value of the forgiveness we have experienced. Our offences against a holy God are too numerous, too aggravated, too heinous to be compared for a moment with the weightiest offences we may have sustained at the hands of our fellow-men. And if God has passed by all these transgressions, if He has cast them for ever into the depths of the sea, O surely it is but a small matter that we should pass by the trifling and unimportant injuries that are committed against us. If, then, we hope for the divine forgiveness, let us freely forgive those that trespass against us, and should their injuries be ever so numerous and ever so irritating, let us forgive them, not only “until seven times, but until seventy times seven.”

Such, reader, is the spirit of the gospel: is it the spirit that animates your heart? Have you ever known what it is to have found mercy of God? Have you ever tasted and seen that He is gracious? Or does not that envious, malicious, revengeful temper, manifest but too plainly that you are a stranger

to vital godliness, that with all your profession you have never known its power? Come then to the fountain which has been opened in the house of David, for sin and for uncleanness. Wash and be clean. But O, never imagine that you have been buried with Christ in his death, unless you have risen with Him unto newness of life.

SECTION V.—FASTING.

MAT. VI. 16-18.

The three great Christian duties in which the Pharisees of our Lord's time chiefly abounded, were Alms-giving, Prayer, and Fasting. Our blessed Lord in this discourse treats of them in regular order, showing, that in each and all of them the same unhallowed feeling was at work—a desire to be seen and applauded of men. If they gave alms to the poor it was in the most public and ostentatious manner; if they engaged in the solemn exercise of prayer it was in the most open places, the synagogues, and the corners of the streets; and if they fasted, the exercise partook of the same character.

V. 16. “Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure

their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

Fasting, or an abstinence from food for a season, as a token of the humiliation of the soul, as well as for purposes of devotion, has been practised in all ages. It is a natural expression of grief; for when the mind is much distressed on any account whatever, a man's "life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat." His heart is full, and his appetite is gone. And while fasting, as a religious observance, has its foundation in nature, it is evidently sanctioned by the whole Word of God. By the law of Moses, a national fast was appointed to be observed once every year, that the people of Israel might "afflict their souls." Throughout the whole of the Old Testament history, we have frequent mention of fasts having been proclaimed on special public occasions. Thus, Jehoshaphat issued a decree, that the Jews should fast when the enemy came against Judea in overwhelming numbers. At the coming up of the people from the captivity of Babylon, Ezra, the governor, called upon the people to fast and pray, before setting out on their return to their own land. Various other cases occur, both among the Jews and Gentiles, in which public fasts were commanded and observed.

Our Lord, however, in the passage now under consideration, speaks not of public, but of private fasts, such as pious men in all ages have often practised,

abstaining either altogether or partially from food for a time, that they might give themselves up to solemn humiliation and earnest prayer. Nor does our Lord utter a single word to discourage from the observance of this duty. The Pharisee fasted regularly twice in the week, and Jesus objects not to the duty, but to the manner in which the duty was observed. He admits that it was right that the soul should be humbled before God in the deepest humiliation and heart-felt contrition; that even the outward expression of this inward feeling, by the observance of fasting, was not unsuitable, but rather to be commended; and yet He warns His disciples that true, acceptable fasting must be of a very different character from that of the formalist. The Pharisee was wont to appear, on the days which he had set apart for fasting, clothed in the meanest dress, with his head and face covered with ashes, his head hanging down like a bulrush, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, wishing to convey, by his whole aspect and demeanour, that his soul was weighed down to the dust because of sin. Such a mode of fasting God abhorreth. It is done, not as unto God, but as unto man, and "verily," says our Lord, "they have their reward." Men behold and admire; but what of that? A poor reward it is.—"It is not he who commendeth himself, or whom man commendeth, that will be approved on the Great Day, but he," and he only, "whom the Lord commendeth."

The fast which God will accept consists not of mere "bodily exercise," which "profiteth little," but of a soul subdued under a sense of sin. We must rend our hearts, and not our garments. "With that man will I dwell, even with him that is of an humble and a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." In regard to the extent to which fasting or abstinence from food ought to be carried, no regulations are laid down in the Word of God. Whether the abstinence be total for a time, or only partial, must depend upon the peculiar constitution of each individual; but it cannot be denied, however much, in the present state of the Church, the practice is neglected, that good men in all ages have fasted. David "humbled his soul with fasting," and Daniel "set his face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." In the New Testament we find Anna, the prophetess, serving God with fastings and prayers day and night; the Gentile Cornelius is engaged in fasting and prayer when the Angel of God appears to him; and we are expressly informed that "the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast oft." And when the objection was made to the Redeemer, that His disciples fasted not, the reply which He made shows clearly that fasting must be considered as a recognized duty even under the Christian dispensation. "Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bride-

groom is with them? but the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." The duty of fasting, then, has a deeper meaning than the mere abstinence from food; for "meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." It involves repentance toward God, leading us to lie low in the dust before Him, and to repent in dust and in ashes. Our Lord, therefore, calls away the attention of His people from the outward bodily observance to the inward spiritual exercise.

Vv. 17 and 18. "But thou, when thou fastest, annoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The use of fragrant ointments or perfumes, and of frequent washings, is still prevalent in Eastern countries, as a part of the ordinary habits of the people; and such customs are referred to by our Lord, on this occasion, to show that it is the duty of a Christian to abstain from all appearance of ostentation in his religious exercises, and to have an exclusive regard to "the honour that cometh from God only." The essential part of fasting is a broken and contrite spirit, which is, in the sight of God, an acceptable sacrifice. We may be more or less rigorous in the outward act of abstinence from

food, as our bodily constitution and other circumstances seem to warrant; but if the soul be rightly exercised, sin will be felt to be a heavy burden, weighing down and oppressing the spirit, so that we will be able to take up the language of David, "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee." And when the soul is thus truly humbled, and mourns on account of sin, it is especially fitted for the reception of the grace of God. "He giveth grace unto the humble." God dwells in that soul by His Spirit, and imparts refreshing, comforting, sanctifying grace; but such a frame of mind will not seek to obtrude itself on the notice of men; it shrinks rather from public observation. The penitent publican stands afar off, as if unworthy to mingle with other suppliants.

He cannot "lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smites upon his breast, exclaiming, God be merciful to me a sinner."

There may be often deep convictions of sin arising, as in the case of Judas, from some special sin, which has been attended, it may be, with some aggravating circumstances; but if our convictions of sin be of a truly saving character, we will trace that very sin which is lying heavy on the conscience, to the polluted fountain of the heart. This is remarkably seen in the fifty-first psalm, where David, not contented with confessing particular sins, acknowledges the original and entire depravity of his nature—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." And Isaiah, while lamenting the sin of idolatry with which his countrymen were chargeable, exclaims, "The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint. From the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in us." The discovery of one sin leads the truly humbled soul to a perception of the real source of sin—"a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and the savingly convinced sinner is forced to join in the exclamation, "Who can know it?" Alas! no man, but He alone who is the holy and heart-searching Jehovah.

Another characteristic of a truly mourning penitent soul is, that it looks rather to the holiness of God's

law than to its fearful penalty. At first, indeed, and perhaps for a long time, the sinner may be borne down with an apprehension of coming wrath, but at length these convictions give place to others of a different description. It is not so much the fear of hell that now overwhelms his soul, as horror at the pollution of sin. Formerly he was tormented with the dread of an angry God; now he thoroughly "abhors himself"—"he loathes himself because he is vile." The convictions of Cain led him only to exclaim, "My punishment is greater than I am able to bear;" but the convictions of David forced him to cry, "Mine iniquities have taken hold on me: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear." The difference is obvious:—The one was under legal convictions; the other had entered upon a course of evangelical saving repentance.

But one of the most striking and evident marks of a mourning, repentant soul is, that it is softened and subdued. When we view simply the power of God, and think of Him only as a consuming fire, we have that fear of Him in which there is no love, and which tends to harden the rebellious soul; but let the Spirit reveal to us the love of God, as manifested in Christ Jesus, and straightway the soul is melted. It was the benevolence and kindness of the look of Christ which led Peter to quit the judgment hall with a bursting heart. We are told that "he went out and wept bit-

terly." And how softened is his spirit from that hour! Our Lord puts to him the question, "Lovest thou me?" He no longer expresses himself with his former confidence,—“Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I,”—his simple reply is, “Yea, Lord.” And when pressed by a further repetition of the question, he does not break forth into rash, self-confident declarations of his attachment to his Lord, but he puts the matter into Christ’s own hands—“Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

And we remark further, that the broken, contrite spirit, finds peace in the blood of the covenant. The Gadarenes were thrown into alarm by the presence of Christ in their country, and they besought Him to depart out of their coasts. But the man who has been savingly convicted of sin flies *to* Christ, not *from* Him. He cries out with the utmost earnestness, “What shall I do?” and, taking his position at the foot of the cross, exclaims, “Lord save me or I perish.” He looks upon Him whom he hath pierced, and mourns, and lo! from the very wounds which his sins have inflicted there flows a fountain of all cleansing power, in which he washes and is made clean. “Being justified by faith, He has now peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Not satisfied, however, with peace, the humbled soul seeks purity. He feels that he has done iniquity, and he resolves, in the strength of divine grace, that he

will do so no more. He is watchful, therefore, against all sin, more especially the sins that do most easily beset him. Those sins by which he was once led captive are now peculiarly hateful to him. He looks upon them as the badges of his slavery. If, therefore, they are present to his view his soul is pained, and he strives and prays that he may never again fall under their power. How must the believers in the Church of Corinth have been affected, even to tears, when the solemn passage of the First Epistle which Paul addresses to them, was read in their hearing, vi. 9-11 :—“ Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Peter denied his Lord, but how fearless and uncompromising was his confession of Christ ever afterwards! The humbled soul hates sin and flees from it. This is the fasting which is peculiarly acceptable to God. Isaiah lviii. 6-11: “ Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye

break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day."

And this humility and mourning on account of sin is far from being a mere passing exercise; it is a habitual frame of mind. The believer walks softly all his days. He remembers "the rock whence he was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence he was digged," as Paul did when many years after he had been struck down by a light from heaven, and savingly converted on the road to Damascus, he says concerning his history previous to his conversion, "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." The believer cannot think of the years which he passed in unbelief and sin, without feeling that he has the deepest cause for humiliation of spirit,

and the utmost need of tenderness and circumspection of walk and conversation.

But while the child of God is habitually a contrite one, his godly sorrow for sin is known only to his Father who seeth in secret. His is a grief which calls forth many a sigh, many a tear, many an earnest prayer in his secret retirement. He feels that it is against God he has offended, and, therefore, he returns to his Father who "hath smitten and who will heal, who hath torn and who will bind him up." This exercise of soul is altogether concealed from his fellow-men. He needs no outward signs of sorrow. His inmost feelings are known to God. His tears, his prayers, his sighs, the secret anguish of his soul, all is naked and open before that God with whom we have to do.

Nor will this godly sorrow be fruitless and unavailing. He that seeth in secret shall reward the humble penitent openly. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." "Weeping may endure for a night," in the believer's experience, "but joy cometh in the morning." The hour is on the wing when the promise shall be fulfilled in all its extent, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," when "every tear shall be wiped from every eye," when the redeemed "of the Lord shall

return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." "Blessed are they that weep now, for they shall laugh" hereafter. The days of the believer's mourning shall be for ever ended, when he shall enter into the joy of his Lord, and experience those inexhaustible pleasures which are at God's right hand.

To whatever conclusion, then, any believer may come as to his duty, in reference to outward fasting, true penitence, it must be admitted, is an invariable accompaniment of the Christian character. Humility is a cardinal virtue of the renewed nature : it is one of the most precious fruits of the Spirit, and that which prepares the soul for the reception of all the rest ; it empties us of self, that we may be filled with all the fulness of Christ ; it lays us low, that in due time we may be exalted ; and the higher our attainments in the divine life, the lower our estimate of ourselves. It is the very man who had been admitted into the third heavens, that calls himself "the least of all saints ; that am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God."

But it is worthy of remark, that just as there is a fasting which has no higher end in view than to be seen and admired of men, there is also a repentance which is so far from being acceptable to God, that it "needs to be repented of:" it extends no further than

the natural convictions of an awakened conscience. Even the most hardened sinners have their seasons of occasional and temporary remorse : they feel that all is not right with them ; but instead of cherishing those impressions, which might, by the blessing of the Spirit, lead to a change of heart and character, they seek to stifle them, by plunging into worldly company or resorting to intoxicating pleasures. But no man can experience such convictions, however transient and temporary, without incurring deep responsibility. Let every one beware how he trifles with such impressions. If they do not melt the soul, they will assuredly harden it ; if they do not render a man better, they will render him worse : his convictions cannot leave him in the precise position in which they found him. It is his bounden duty, therefore, instead of banishing, to cherish them as far as possible, praying that he may be led to see more of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of his own vileness in particular. Be assured, that however deep and tormenting your convictions of sin, they come far short of the reality. Did you see the plague of your own heart, as it is seen by a holy, heart-searching God, it would be more than your frail nature could abide the sight of ; but do not shrink from striving after closer, more affecting views of your own worthlessness, and for this purpose dwell much upon the holy character of Jehovah, upon the spirituality and extent of His law, and, above all,

gaze upon Him whom you have pierced by your sins, until, like Job, you are able to say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and in ashes."

And now that the arrow of conviction has pierced the sinner's heart and drunk up his spirit, let him repair to the remedy provided in the gospel. Thus, wounded and heart-broken, how refreshing to him may the glad news be, that "there is balm in Gilead, and a Physician there." Often, it may be, has he read his Bible; but that blessed book will now appear to him in a very different light from that in which it ever did before. Here he finds all that he so much needed—a pardon free, full, and irrevocable, and an assurance of deliverance from that pollution, on account of which he loathes and abhors himself.

It is not enough, however, that the convinced, humbled sinner knows from God's Word that there is a remedy: he must strive to make sure of a personal interest in it by closing with the offer of Christ in the gospel. The offer is free and unconditional. He is invited to receive Him, to embrace Him, to close with Him. Let him put in his claim then on the ground of this free invitation, and give himself up to Christ, to be pardoned, sanctified, and saved. Then it is that being justified by faith, he will begin to experi-

ence peace with God, a peace that passeth all understanding.

But while we have been speaking of a godly sorrow for sin, as the habitual characteristic of a believer, and as forming, indeed, the commencing process of the work of grace in the soul; there are some children of God who are not conscious of this deep sorrow, and who may therefore be ready to doubt, after all we have said, whether they are Christians at all. They often bewail the hardness of their hearts, the coldness and deadness of their affections, and the want of that humbleness of spirit, which a habitual sense of sin ought to awaken. But let such persons be reminded that just as there may be a fasting where there is nothing discernible to our fellow-men, there may be, and there often is a secret conviction of sin, and genuine humility of soul where there is no strong feeling of uneasiness or of painful remorse. And what is this complaint, mourning soul, of the want of feeling, but one of the surest proofs that though you are not conscious of it, feeling is there! If your heart had not been softened by the Spirit of God, you would not thus lament your want of softness.

May there not be some, who, because we have been teaching that sorrow for sin is essential to the Christian character, and they have never felt such a sorrow, may think themselves warranted in giving themselves up to indifference and unconcern! Do

you really suppose that this is a state of mind which ought to be cherished? Be assured that your impenitence and hardness of heart is the most alarming symptom of your case. There is not the slightest movement betokening the effort of a living power. You are dead, utterly, and to all appearance irretrievably dead. If nothing has hitherto availed to rouse you, will not the very thought that you are thus apparently given over to hopeless impenitence and unbelief, lead you to cry from the very depths of your inmost soul, "Cast me not away from thy presence, take not thy holy Spirit from me?"

CHAPTER II.

PERSONAL LIFE OF PHARISEES.

SECTION I.—SOURCE OF CHIEF HAPPINESS.

MAT. VI. 19-24.

The Redeemer has been illustrating the important principle of His kingdom, that God is the all in all of our religious duties, that in all our attempts to serve Him, our supreme anxiety must be to approve ourselves to Him, and to Him alone. And having shewn the necessity of this principle, by a reference to three different acts of service, alms-deeds, prayer, and fasting, He proceeds to lay down the equally important principle that God must be the all in all of the believer's heart. His demand admits of no compromise, "My son, give me thine heart." "He is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to any other." Jesus therefore fixes the attention of His hearers upon those objects which were too liable to engage the desires and feelings of the heart in preference to God,

and warns His hearers against all such spiritual idolatry as offensive in the sight of the Holy One.

Vv. 19 and 20. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal : But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

The desire of amassing wealth of one kind or another is a strong principle in the unrenewed mind. It is not necessary that the treasure be always of silver and gold, though an apostle warns us that "the love of money is the root of all evil ; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." The treasures to which our Lord refers in the passage before us include all those objects on which the heart of man is wont to pride itself. We must not for a moment imagine that the Redeemer is here forbidding His people to make any provision for the future comfort of themselves and their families. His design is of a higher nature. He uses the word treasure to denote that which chiefly occupies the thoughts and engages the heart. And accordingly He follows up His exhortation by setting forth the reason :

V. 21. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

It is on this ground that our gracious Redeemer calls upon all His people to be on their guard against the engrossing love of wealth. God must be the treasure of the soul, its chief desire, its highest good. He must have the whole heart, or He will have none of it. If, then, any worldly object whatever comes between us and our God, if it prevents our affections from flowing forth with free, and intense, and exclusive regard to our Father in heaven, that object must be viewed as impiously usurping the place in our hearts which belongs to God alone.

The doctrine which our Lord teaches His people on this occasion, is identical in all respects with that of the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," or, indeed, the sum of the whole of the first table of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." No created object, no earthly enjoyment, ought to occupy the room of the true and living God. To admit of this, would be in the highest sense treason to the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords. He claims the hearts of His people as His rightful throne, and before Him every usurper must be cast down. If, then, we are conscious that, in our calm unguarded moments, our thoughts more frequently and more naturally rise to any other object than to God, let our earnest fervent prayer be,

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy Throne,
And worship only thee.”

The exhortation of the Redeemer is expressed, first in a negative, then in a positive form. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.” “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” He presumes that there must be an object, either on earth or in heaven, on which the heart of man must be set. Our affections must go forth towards one object or another. And the whole essence of our Christianity turns upon this one point, On what is our heart supremely set? There are two grand claimants for the throne of our affections—earth and heaven,—the world and God. The Redeemer exhibits them before us. He knows the fearful danger of the one choice, and the eternal safety of the other. The one is death, but the other life; the one is hell, but the other heaven. Where, then, reader, is your treasure? Is it on earth, or is it in heaven? Momentous question!

If the treasure of the soul be on earth, our Redeemer warns us that it is exposed to change, decay, and even destruction, “for moth and rust may corrupt, and thieves break through and steal;” but if the treasure of the soul be in heaven, it is beyond the reach of injury, in a place where no time, no change can destroy, “where neither moth nor rust doth cor-

rupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." All earthly things, of whatever nature they may be, are in themselves liable to decay, they are temporal, only for a time, but heavenly things are imperishable and eternal. Hence the command, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed."

And not only do earthly treasures perish, they are liable to be taken from us. How often do riches take unto themselves wings and fly away! How often do we find the fair sunshine of prosperity beclouded by the darkness of a sudden adversity! But far otherwise is it with heavenly possessions. They are laid up within an impregnable fortress, which no enemy can ever reach, "reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." How true is it then, that believers have "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading in the heavens." "If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on the things on the earth." This is the only wise, the only safe, the only happy choice.

There is no man, who has by grace been permitted to see the beauty of the Lord, as reflected from the

face of Jesus Christ, that can fail to discern His surpassing glory and excellence as the treasure of the soul. The Psalmist delights in realizing his interest in this all-glorious possession, "Thou art my portion, O Lord." "This God is my God for ever and ever." And the Prophet Habakkuk feels the enjoyment of the Lord as his treasure, to be a compensation far more than sufficient for the loss of all earthly treasures, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." By the offer of Himself, indeed, as the treasure of His people, did God preface and enforce His giving of the law "I am the Lord *thy* God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." And the whole blessings of the new and everlasting covenant are summed up in these words, "I will be to you a God, and ye shall be to me a people." This, then, is a treasure sufficient to meet every want, to satisfy every desire, to guide us in every difficulty, and to infuse into our souls a peace and a happiness akin to those of heaven. Let God then, a God all-sufficient, all-merciful, all-kind, be the object of your highest love, your supreme regard. But never forget, that before He can be all your desire, He must

be all your salvation. It is only when beheld in the face of Christ that you can discern Him to be worthy to reign without a rival in your hearts. It is only in Christ that He makes Himself over to you as an everlasting possession. Away, then, with all other gods, let Jehovah be your own, your only God. If you will not reject Him, He is yours. No other possession can satisfy the desires of an immortal soul; no other can survive the changes of this changeful scene; no other can abide with us in time and throughout a never-ending eternity.

But there are too many professing Christians who would attempt to compromise the matter, who would keep one eye on the earth, and direct the other to the heavens. Such wavering, double-minded men, are unstable in all their ways. They would wish to enjoy God, but they cannot part with the world. Our blessed Redeemer, therefore, proceeds to show the utter inconsistency of such conduct.

Vv. 22 and 23. "The light of the body is the eye: if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

The eye is the appointed organ by which the body is rendered capable of beholding the light; and on the

sound or unsound state of the eye depends our capacity of more or less clearly perceiving the light, and thus being guided in all our movements by the light of day. If the eye be single, clear, unclouded, so as to behold objects not dimly nor confusedly, nor different in any respect in size or appearance from what they really are, then the whole body is full of light; we receive the complete advantage of the light, so as to regulate all our outward actings with ease and correctness. But if, on the other hand, the eye be evil, diseased, bedimmed or clouded, if the eyesight be, to a great extent, interrupted, or for a time entirely gone, then the whole body is full of darkness, we lose the complete advantage of the light. No other part of the body can supply light. We grope in darkness even at noon-day.

This figure which our Lord adopts to rebuke the inconsistency of worldly professors is deeply instructive. The light, or the eye of the soul, is the understanding, and what light is to the body knowledge is to the soul. If the understanding be single, clear, sound, undimmed by prejudice or passion, so as to receive the truth of God with simplicity and godly sincerity, then the whole soul will be full of light, the Word will dwell in us richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. But if, on the other hand, the understanding be evil, warped by prejudice or passion, the prevalence of evil desires, or the indulgence of evil dispositions, then is

the whole soul full of darkness, of ignorance, error, unsoundness in the faith, unsubduedness in the heart, and ungodliness in the life. What a flood of light, then, does this passage throw upon the exhortation of Peter—"Wherefore, laying aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings: as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;" or the exhortation of James—"Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

The remarks of our Lord, in reference to the necessity of singleness of eye, clearly show, that in the estimation of Him who knoweth the heart, the worldly professor is altogether unfitted to receive the truth in the love of it. The truth so completely condemns the whole current of his thoughts and affections, that in its faithfulness and simplicity it is peculiarly offensive to his mind. The hearers of the devout Stephen gnashed upon him with their teeth, and such will be the experience of every faithful minister of Christ, when he speaks home to the consciences of hardened worldlings. Well, then, may our Lord exclaim, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" That is, if our eye be evil, if our minds be blinded by ignorance and prejudice, and our hearts hardened by un-

belief, then the light that is in us is no better than darkness; nay, fearful condition! it is darkness in the midst of real outward and imaginary inward light; we think we see, and yet we are in total darkness. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of those that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." How great, then, is this darkness! There is light shining all around, there is light shining upon the soul, but there is no light in it. The world hath come in between the Sun of Righteousness and the soul, and the consequence is, that the light of the gospel is hid. The man hears the word, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. He is barren and unprofitable in the Lord's vineyard, a cumberer of the ground, spreading a noxious influence all around him.

There is the utmost danger, then, in laying up our treasures upon the earth. We are pursuing a vain and idle phantom; we are preventing ourselves from the perception and the enjoyment of true happiness. We are shutting out the light and plunging ourselves into hopeless darkness. The world is engrossing our affections and desires through the whole week, and we try to pacify our consciences by devoting a slight consideration to the concerns of our souls upon the Sabbath. But this is a foolish, a vain at-

tempt to mock God. Be not deceived, God cannot be mocked. Hear the solemn assurance of the blessed Jesus :

V. 24. "No man can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It is quite possible that a servant may yield obedience to the commands of two masters, provided their interests and their inclinations are quite in harmony. But the case to which our Lord refers is one in which the interests and the commands of two masters are directly opposed to one another, and the servant's mind is distracted, therefore, between two entirely different and opposite influences. He would wish to serve and please them both, but all his attempts are unavailing ; he finds they are so completely at variance, that to hate the one is to love the other, and to hold to the one is to despise the other. Such is the opposition between God and the world, that, whosoever loveth the world, the love of the Father dwelleth not in him, and even the very friendship of the world is enmity with God ; and, therefore, whoever would be a friend of the world, proclaims himself thereby an enemy of God. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" If, then, we

surrender ourselves to the service of the world, giving up the affections of our hearts, and energies of our lives, to mammon, we are plainly guilty of giving to the world the service, the glory and the honour that are due to God alone. Covetousness is plainly declared in the Word of God to be idolatry, the setting up of an idol in our hearts instead of the living God. The difference between a man of the world and a man of God is marked and striking. The one prefers his worldly interests to his religion, and will make all bend before the golden idol which he hath set up in his heart. The other will make his worldly interests entirely subservient to the glory of God and the promotion of His cause. The worldly man is only a friend to religion as long as it seems to favour his own advancement, but let a time of sifting come, and straightway he turns his back upon his Lord, and walks no longer with Him. Multitudes of these false friends of Christ are to be found in the world. There was a Judas among the twelve, and there is many a Judas still who is quite prepared to sell his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. He will walk with Christ outwardly, he will follow Him with apparent steadiness until the world offers its tempting bribe, and then, with a kiss of pretended affection, he will betray his Lord. Ah! it is an easy matter to be a formalist; to cry Lord, Lord; to carry full in the face of the world the lamp of an outward pro-

fession, while there is not a single drop of the oil of grace in the heart. This is all very easy in the meantime ; but it is not so easy to be a Christian with the heart given to God, and our worldly all, without a single reserve, laid at the feet of Jesus, and the whole soul, and body, and spirit, with singleness of purpose, devoted to the service and the glory of God. This, and no other, is true religion ; any other is a divided service, which God abhors,—a wavering between the service of God and the service of the world ; and if any man be in such a state, “ let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.”

Here Jesus sets before you, reader, the two claimants for your heart—God and the world. Choose you, then, which you will serve. If God be God, follow him ; if the world be God, follow it. But do not halt between two opinions. You cannot serve God and Mammon. One or the other must be surrendered. Let your decision be made now, once for all ; the blessing or the curse, life or death, heaven or hell. Do not imagine that you can please both the world and God. You cannot love the world and love God ; you cannot be the friend of the world and the friend of God ; you cannot live to the service of the world and live to the service of God. Renounce either the one or the other. Be honest, be decided. Take your stand either for God or for the world.

The world presents itself before you in the most inviting aspect. It offers you many deceitful promises, many lying vanities, many disappointing hopes, many unsatisfying joys. O believe it not! The world's ways, the world's maxims, the world's pleasures lead down to death. Enrol yourselves, then, among the friends of the Most High God.

But are there not many who are so pleased with the service of the world, that, like the madman, they sport with their chains? They are slaves and they know it not. They are degraded idolaters, and they flatter themselves that they are worshippers of the true God. Think for a moment, deluded worldling, what religion is. It is not the stated observance on the Sabbath of a few outward forms; it is not the daily repetition of a few unmeaning words on your bended knees. It is the unconditional surrender of the heart to God. Have you made this surrender, and are your affections now centred upon the everlasting and unchangeable Jehovah? Nothing short of this is religion. You must rise like Levi from the receipt of custom—you must leave all and follow Christ. This is a hard saying, who can bear it? Yet it is the solemn truth of God.

Perhaps the reader may be saying to himself, I may enjoy the pleasures of the world now, and afterwards I shall enjoy the blessedness of heaven. Strange delusion! Has not Jesus said, "Ye *cannot*

serve God and Mammon ;” and yet you deceive yourself by the thought, that however busily and perseveringly you may spend your strength in the service of the world, you will at last receive the reward which remaineth for the servants of God. It cannot be. If you serve sin and the world, for they are one and the same master, justice and righteousness require that you should receive the wages,—and the wages of sin is death.

In conclusion, we would solemnly urge on every child of God to strive earnestly after that singleness of heart and oneness of purpose, which Jesus requires of all His people. Look not back to the world. “Forget thine own people, and thy father’s house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty.” Let your heart be fixed upon God ; let your steps proceed steadily along the way to Zion, with your face heavenward, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left ; and though now you may often be called to walk in comparative darkness, yet at eventide it shall be light, and at last you shall be privileged to enter the regions of eternal day, where you shall dwell for ever with Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

SECTION II.—SOURCE OF CHIEF ANXIETY.

MAT. VI. 25-34.

In the previous section we found the Redeemer laying down the great principle, that God must be the only treasure of the Christian's soul, and that all the earthly objects on which our affections are liable to be set, are not to be compared, either in intrinsic value or in durability, with Him who is the Covenant God, the unchangeable, the everlasting portion of His people. And if God be infinitely worthy to occupy the supreme place in our hearts, Jesus warns us, that in taking God as our treasure, there must be a firm resolution, a decided choice. We cannot serve God and Mammon. But the objection has been often raised against the doctrine of Christ upon this subject—If I neglect my worldly interests, lest, in pursuing them, I should endanger my soul, am I not in danger of plunging both myself and my family into poverty and wretchedness? The Redeemer knew well that such an objection was liable to occur to the mind, and, therefore, with the utmost kindness and condescension, he hastens to meet it.

V. 25. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink,

nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" There is peculiar force, we conceive, in the introductory expression, "I say unto you," as if Jesus wished at the outset of this remarkable passage to assure His disciples, that the pointed exhortations and reasonings which follow were to be received as coming from the mouth of one who was possessed of full authority to speak in reference both to the bodies and to the souls of men. He was about to speak as the proprietor and Lord of all, who had the whole resources of the universe at His command, and any assurance, therefore, which He might give as to the temporal support of His people might be listened to with the utmost confidence.

What, then, is the exhortation that issues from the lips of Him who is "the heir of all things?" It is couched in these emphatic words, "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." The words here translated, "Take no thought," might far more truly have been rendered, "Be not over anxious, or, "do not perplex yourselves." Our Lord must not be understood as implying that we are to take no thought at all about worldly matters, that we are to be indifferent and unconcerned about the temporal support of ourselves and our families. Such a doctrine is nowhere inculcated in the Word of God.

On the contrary, we are expressly commanded to be at once "diligent in business and fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." "This we command you," says the apostle Paul, "that if any would not work neither should he eat; for we know that there are some among you who walk disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies." So strongly, indeed, is the duty of careful attention to our worldly calling inculcated in the Bible, that "the man who provides not for his own, and especially for those of his own house," is plainly declared to have "denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." The reason of such a strong statement is plain. For while an infidel denies the outward revelation in the Word, the man who makes no exertions to provide for his own bodily wants and those of his family, is chargeable with an express denial of the outward revelation of God's will in the Bible, and also the inward revelation of God's will in the heart. He is guilty, therefore, of a double infidelity; he is worse than an infidel.

But while it is a duty incumbent on us, both on scriptural and natural grounds, to be conscientiously active and industrious in the prosecution of our worldly business, there is undoubtedly a danger lest the affairs of this life should occupy the chief place in our hearts. Our Lord, therefore, knowing well how prone we are to cleave to the dust, cautions us against all over-anxiety about even the necessary subsistence for

the body. "Take no thought," says He, that is, let your mind not be agitated or disturbed with undue solicitude about the supply of your bodily wants. And this important exhortation He enforces on a variety of different considerations which we shall endeavour to notice as they successively occur in the passage now before us.

The *first* argument against immoderate anxiety about our bodily subsistence is found in the close of the 25th verse. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" Several commentators understand these words as denoting, that if God has given us life, we may well believe that He will not refuse to give us the food that is necessary to sustain that life, and if He has given us a body, He will not deny the lesser gift of clothing to cover that body. On a careful consideration of the passage, however, in connection with the scope of our Lord's remarks in the preceding context, we are brought to the conclusion that such an interpretation of the words scarcely includes their full meaning. Our Lord has been speaking of the infinite superiority of heavenly to earthly blessings, and calling upon His disciples to set their affections supremely upon the things that are above. And when He warns them against too great anxiety about worldly things, He asks, "Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment?" That is, what would it profit a man if he were to obtain meat at the expense

of that very life which it was intended to support, or clothing at the expense of that body which it was intended to cover? Even so would it be foolish in the extreme, for a man to expend the energies of his soul in seeking the mere support of his body at the expense of his best, his highest, his eternal interests. Is it not a plain and unquestionable truth, that the life is more than the meat that sustains it, and the body is more than the raiment that clothes it; and is it not a truth equally plain, and equally unquestionable, that the soul is to be preferred to the mere temporary tabernacle which it now inhabits. And the man who would destroy his soul by an exclusive or even an immoderate attention to the concerns of his body, would be chargeable with a folly equal to that of the man who would destroy his natural life in seeking after the meat that ought to have gone to support it, or the man who would destroy his body in seeking after the clothing that ought to have gone to cover it. The lesson, then, which, according to this view of the passage, our Lord inculcates is, that the lesser interests are plainly to be subordinated, and even, if necessary, to be sacrificed to the higher, the meat to the life, the raiment to the body, and, infinitely more, the body to the soul.

The *second* argument against over-anxiety about our worldly support is drawn from the care which God exercises over the inferior creatures of His hand.

Vv. 26-30. "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Our blessed Lord invites us to contemplate the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and to mark with what unwearied attention the all-gracious Creator provides for the creatures He has formed. In the thought of this, David exclaims, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." And again, "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good." With what care, then, does God provide for the wants of his irrational creatures, who are incapable of the forethought and the industry which we are fitted to exercise! We have more

wisdom than the beasts of the field, we are endowed with more understanding than the fowls of heaven ; yet they, without anxiety, obtain the supply of all their wants. " Who provideth for the raven his food ? " " The young lions roar after their prey, they seek their meat from God." " Your heavenly Father," says Jesus, " feedeth them." Observe, believer, He is their maker, their owner, but He is your Father ; and how does the thought of this rebuke your unbelief and distrust of His providential care ? " Are ye not much better than they ? " In some respects, even, the very irrational creatures excel the saints of God, for the prophet Isaiah says, " The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." With all their sins and shortcomings His people are precious in the estimation of their redeeming God. " Ye are of more value than many sparrows." Nay, amid the unwearied cares which He exercises over the lower animals, we are told, Ps. xxxiv. 10, " The young lions do lack and suffer hunger : but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." Where, then, is the necessity for that corroding anxiety wherewith the believer's mind is so often harassed, about the support of his frail, dying body ?

And our Lord goes on to remind us how unavailing all this anxiety is ; how helpless we are, and incapable, by our own unaided efforts, to better our con-

dition in the very smallest matter. "Which of you," says he, "by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? The word here translated "stature" may also be rendered "age," and it is more probable that this is its meaning, as the body of man seldom exceeding in height four cubits, it is not at all likely that to express a trifling addition he would have adduced such an example. That our Lord is speaking of something insignificantly small is plain from the parallel passage in Luke's gospel, where it is added, "If ye then be not able to do that which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?" The probability then is that Christ refers to some small addition to our age, the lengthening out of our days. And the force of the argument lies in this, that if we are so helpless as to be incapable by the utmost anxiety to make the least addition to our age, why should we distress ourselves as if we could by our anxiety accomplish the greatest objects. We are vexing ourselves in vain; we are engaged in a fruitless effort to perform that by our own strength which it is alike our duty and our privilege to put into the hands of our heavenly Father.

But the providence of God is not limited to the supply of one species of bodily wants, it extends alike to all. He supplies food for the support of life, and He supplies also raiment for the clothing of the body. In proof of this, Jesus points to the gorgeous lily of the east, which, with its white and purple tints beauti-

fully blended, far outrivals even the most magnificent forms of art, so that "Solomon in all his glory," though clothed in the splendid purple garments of the eastern monarch, "was not arrayed like one of these." The argument, then, which our Lord draws from the contemplation of this beautiful object in nature against all undue anxiety about the clothing needful for the body, is thus expressed, "If then God so clothe the grass or herbage of the field, which is so fleeting and transitory in its nature that to-day it is and to-morrow it is cast into the oven, to be consumed as fuel, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Clothing ought to be viewed by us as a remembrance of the fall; it is a monument of our shame. And, instead of priding ourselves on this badge of our degradation, we ought rather to reflect how much even the most elegant and expensive attire is surpassed in beauty by the perishing flowers of the field. And what a rebuke does that lovely flower, believer, on which thou art treading, administer to thy faithlessness! It was God that made it thus, *its* maker, but *thy* Father. And if He hath thus beautifully clothed it "will He not much more clothe you?" Be not faithless, then, but believing. All nature proclaims thee to be of little faith. "Consider the lilies," how frail and short-lived, yet how beautiful. And if God has expended such care upon a fleeting flower, which "in the morning flourisheth and groweth up, and in the evening

is cut down and withered," will He not clothe you who are born for immortality? This wasting anxiety is a want of faith; it is a sinful distrust of thy Creator's care, thy Father's love. His command to thee is, "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

A *third* argument against over-anxiety about our worldly affairs is drawn by our Lord from its utter inconsistency with the Christian character. Such a frame of mind, He tells us, belongs not to the Christian but to the heathen.

V. 31, and first half of 32. "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.)"

The blinded heathen, who are utterly ignorant of the existence and character of the true God, cannot be expected to have their minds free from anxiety about the supply of their temporal wants. Each man among them is, as it were, a god to himself. His desires are limited to the supply of what are termed the primary wants of man,—food, and clothing, and shelter. To obtain these his whole energies are exerted, his whole schemes are directed. But the Christian has far higher views, a firmer resting-place for his thoughts. He, as well as the darkest and most be-

nighted heathen, has bodily wants which must be supplied, but he is not left to plant and to water without a God to give the increase. His cares, then, may well be moderated, his anxieties restrained. The God whom he loves is the God of providence, whose authority the elements of universal nature acknowledge and obey. His delight, therefore, is to cast all his care upon God, believing that He careth for him.

And further, Jesus reminds his disciples that the God of the Christian is not like the blind, irrational god of the heathen ; but, in the most beautiful and affecting language He declares, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." God is in heaven infinitely exalted above us, enwrapped in the contemplation of his own ineffable glory ; but to the believer He is a father in heaven. He looks down from the throne of His glory upon each one of that blessed people whom He hath chosen for Himself. He knows their condition with the utmost minuteness. He pities their weakness, their helplessness, their poverty. He supplies all their wants, both temporal and spiritual. He hath redeemed their souls from death, and it is but a small matter to preserve their bodies in life. "*He* knows that they have need of all these things." He in whose hand are all the stores of the universe ; He who is Almighty, All-wise, All-loving, *knows* the wants of His people, and

it is enough that He knows them. He hath given us a sufficient pledge that He will withhold no good thing from them that love Him. "If God spared not His own son, but freely gave Him up unto the death for us all, will He not with Him also freely give us all things? "My God," says Paul, "shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Having earnestly, and with much affection, warned His followers against all immoderate attachment to the world, whether as an object of regard for the present or anxiety for the future, Jesus proceeds to lay down the grand object towards which the desires and the energies of the believer ought to be directed.

33. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

By the expression, "the kingdom of God," which occurs so frequently in the Sermon on the Mount, we have more than once stated is meant the kingdom of grace, which Christ by His Spirit establishes in the hearts of His people, and which begun on earth is consummated in the kingdom of glory in heaven. This kingdom is not meat and drink, or consisting of mere external observances, but an internal work in the soul; it is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Hence we find God's righteous-

ness combined in the text with His kingdom. The righteousness referred to is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was appointed and accepted by God, and which having been wrought out by the God-man, Christ Jesus, is well entitled to be regarded as the righteousness of God. That righteousness is imputed to the believer and received by faith as his own, and on the ground of this imputed righteousness alone is he accepted of God, and receives a title to the enjoyment of the kingdom. But not only is the imputed righteousness of Christ entitled to be called the righteousness of God, the inherent, active righteousness wrought in the soul of the believer by the Spirit of God is entitled to the same appellation. It was appointed by God to be the mode of preparation for the kingdom,—it is wrought by God, the Holy Ghost, by His effectual operation in the soul, and it is by means of this righteousness that believers are fitted for the enjoyment of God in heaven. Both the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the inherent righteousness of the Christian, are essential to the possession of the kingdom. The Redeemer, accordingly, calls upon us to make both of them the objects of our anxious and eager desire. We must seek them in earnest, believing prayer; we must seek them in the diligent use of all the outward means of grace. Prayer and pains in this matter must go together. This is not an object about which we may be indifferent or uncon-

cerned. On the contrary we are commanded to seek it first. On this point we remark,

1. That the kingdom of God and His righteousness must be sought as first in *importance*, infinitely to be preferred to all worldly objects whatever. There may be many things in the world which we may consider worthy of our attention, but in comparison of an interest in the kingdom, all other things dwindle into utter insignificance. What could equal this glorious object? "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."

2. The kingdom of God and His righteousness must be sought first in point of *intensity of exertion*. We must "strive" or agonize "to enter in at the strait gate." "We must labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." Well may the remonstrance be addressed to us, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

3. The kingdom of God and His righteousness must

be sought first in point of *time*. It will not do to prefer other things before this. It is the one thing needful. Our worldly concerns may be delayed, this cannot. Salvation is the first, the grand object, to a ruined sinner. "Now is the accepted time;" tomorrow may be too late. "To-day, therefore,—while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts."

And the exhortation of the Redeemer is followed up by a gracious promise, "All these things shall be added unto you," that is, you shall receive the kingdom, and you shall obtain all temporal blessings that are needful for you. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear Him." "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." How evident is it, then, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Well may Jesus conclude this glorious passage by repeating His exhortation, enforced as it has been by many powerful and convincing arguments :

V. 34. "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow : for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Not contented with present evils, we accumulate upon ourselves a load of distressing anxieties and perplexities about the future. Our Lord, however, exhorts His people to employ themselves in the faith-

ful discharge of present duty, and the patient endurance of present trials, committing the future into the hands of God. The present moment alone is ours. We know not what shall be on the morrow. Perhaps that dark cloud, believer, which seems charged with a thousand evils, is fraught with ten thousand blessings, which to-morrow shall be showered upon thy head. Roll thy burden of care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. "Plead the promise at the footstool, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." Art thou afraid that to-morrow's sun shall see thee and thy beloved little ones plunged into poverty, and overwhelmed with the deepest earthly cares and anxieties? Be assured, believer, that "to-morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." If its duties are to be weighty, and its difficulties many, the God of Jacob will still be thy refuge, and underneath thee will be the everlasting arm. Why so anxious, so alarmed about the future? Are present trials not sufficient to exercise all the grace that has been committed to thee, and wilt thou take upon thee an additional load of cares, which thy heavenly Father never designed thee to bear? Thy covenant God hath taken thy future provision into His own hands, and He would have thee to come to the footstool as a daily pensioner upon His bounty, crying, "Give me this day my daily bread." "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

How peaceful, how tranquil, how serene, may the bosom of the child of God be ! He is invited to "be careful for nothing," to commit all to God in believing prayer, and his shall be the experience of the promise, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Christ Jesus." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." But what a contrast does the heart of the worldly man exhibit ! It is agitated and distracted with ten thousand cares, and anxieties, and fears. It is like the troubled sea that cannot rest. There is no loving Saviour present, to say to its disturbed and heaving billows, Peace, be still. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." And what is the commotion, worldling, that now stirs from their very depths the strongest feelings of thy soul, but a precursor of that fearful agony of spirit which shall be thy portion in the place of torment ? Seek peace now through Him, that hath made peace by the blood of His cross. Lay hold of the skirt of the Redeemer's garment ; claim an interest in the Prince of Peace ; then shall thy peace flow like a river, and thy righteousness like the waves of the sea.

CHAPTER III.

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PHARISEES.

SECTION I.—UNCHARITABLE JUDGMENTS.

MAT. VII. 1 6.

THROUGHOUT the whole of the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel, the Redeemer has been laying down the great leading principles by which His disciples ought ever to be actuated in so far as God is concerned. The Pharisees, or formalists of that day, like the formalists of our own, though they made a high outward profession of Christianity, were in reality hypocritical worldlings, who engaged in religious duties with no other view than to be seen and admired of men, and instead of setting their hearts upon God as the chief treasure of the soul, the whole desires of their hearts, and the whole energies of their life, were devoted to the things of the world. Our blessed Lord accordingly lays it down as an established law of His kingdom, that God must be the all in all of our religious duties, and He must be the all in all of the affections of our hearts.

But the formalist is not only living in a practical

violation of his duty to God; he is also living in a practical violation of his duty to man. The two tables of the Moral Law are essentially and inseparably connected. The religion of the Bible requires us to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and it requires us, with equal authority, to love our neighbour as ourselves. The Pharisee was unsound in his views of the one, and he was just as unsound in his views of the other. If he falsely trusted that he was righteous in the sight of God, this very error led him to despise others. If he could say, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess," the same spirit led him to say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." In both cases he was puffed up with pride, and therefore he fell into the condemnation of the devil. Self-righteousness is the offspring of pride; it is pride towards God,—one of the most hateful forms which pride can possibly assume; and its invariable accompaniment is pride towards man—an unseemly and odious preferring of ourselves to our fellow-men.

In opposition to such a spirit, our blessed Redeemer issues the pointed exhortation—

V. 1. "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that our blessed Lord is not forbidding the administration of justice in courts of law, or by the authorised judges of

the land ; neither is He to be understood as forbidding the exercise of our own private judgment on what is properly within our sphere. On the contrary, we are commanded, 1 Thess. v. 21, " Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good." Still less does our Lord mean to discountenance the strictest self-examination, with a view to discover our own principles, and sentiments, and character. This plain scriptural duty the apostle enforces upon us, when he exhorts us, that if " we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." The true design of our Lord in the text may be learned, not only from the context, but from the parallel passage in Luke vi. 37, " Judge not, and ye shall not be judged : condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned : forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." From these words, it is plain that our Lord warns His disciples against all rash, censorious, condemnatory judgments upon their fellow-men. He wishes that all His people should avoid the presumptuous conduct of the formalist who, puffed up with a high opinion of his own excellence, recklessly usurps the tribunal of the Searcher of Hearts, and ventures to give forth his judgment upon the motives and secret feelings of others, while all the time he is in utter ignorance of himself.

Against all such unwarrantable and censorious judgments in reference to our fellow-men, the Redeemer gives His solemn warning, " Judge not, that ye be not judged." We must not be ready to take up

an evil report against our neighbour, but seek to exercise that charity which "hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things." There is a spirit akin to that of the Evil One, which "rejoiceth in iniquity," which exults in the halting of a neighbour, more especially if a professor of Christianity, which aggravates his crime, and hastens to pronounce upon him a sweeping condemnation. How different the spirit of the true believer! "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." He weeps, but he will not rashly judge; he hates sin, but his heart bleeds for the sinner; he pities and he prays for him, remembering that he himself also is compassed about with manifold infirmities; for one fault that he finds in his neighbour, he will, on reflection, find two in himself.

But if censorious judgment is opposed to the spirit of the gospel in any case, much more when the object of it is a fallen Christian who may conscientiously differ from us on some points of lesser moment. On this subject the exhortation of the apostle is explicit, Rom. xiv. 1-5, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

to his own master he standeth or falleth ; yea, he shall be holden up : for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another ; another man esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." And again, verses 10-13, "But why dost thou judge thy brother ? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother ? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more : but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way." These words contain a powerful reproof to those who are disposed to judge uncharitably of individuals, who, though they hold the same faith, and are animated by the same hope, yet may have deemed it their duty to attach themselves to different sections of the Church of Christ from that to which we belong. If the points which separate us and them be vital,—affecting, as we believe, the very foundation and framework of the Church of Christ,—let us protest with the utmost firmness against the error, but let us beware of rashly judging or condemning the men who, probably in ignorance, hold the error.

The reason on which our Lord rests his prohibition

of rash, unwarranted judgment of our fellow-men, is one of a very solemn nature. He warns us that we too shall be judged. "Every one of us must give account of himself to God." The secrets of all hearts will then be made known; and, therefore, it is our plain duty to follow the exhortation of the apostle, 1 Cor. iv. 5, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God." And the grand principle on which the final judgment will then take place is thus stated by our Lord:—

V. 2. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

The man who judges rashly and censoriously is not animated by the law of love. He has not come under the law to Christ. He is therefore a debtor to do the whole law of a righteous and holy God. By that law he shall be judged, and by that law he shall be condemned. By his whole conduct he has shewn that he appeals to the justice of God, and by its righteous decisions his destiny shall be sealed. The entire rectitude of the final judgment is here declared. The sentence pronounced upon each individual shall be in accordance with the strictest justice. All his

past thoughts, and words, and actions, will pass before his memory in rapid succession, and his conscience, viewing all in the light of eternity, will be compelled to own that his righteous Judge is "a God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed." "And I saw the dead," says John in the Apocalyptic vision, "small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." From this description, it appears that each man's works will be compared with a standard, and that the sentence will be awarded according to the result of this comparison. Now, the man who judges his neighbour rashly, instead of being regulated by the law of love, is pretending to decide according to strict, impartial justice; nay, he is rigorous, unbending, and severe. "With what judgment" then, he judges others, he himself will at last be judged; and with what measure he meted out to others, it shall at last be measured to him again. He calls loudly for punishment upon others, and he himself shall not escape. "The judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened," and "he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy." Let us endeavour, therefore, in our judgments upon our neighbour, to look forward to the judgment-day, and strive to entertain the most favourable opinion

that circumstances will possibly warrant, and instead of harshly uttering the language of censure on all occasions, let the law of kindness and love be on our hearts ; and, even, when called to rebuke, let it be with faithfulness, yet with tenderness, remembering our own sinfulness and unworthiness. Even those who are called to reprove with authority, as the constituted office-bearers in the Church of Christ, are thus commanded, Gal. vi. 1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." How much more is it the duty of the private Christian to exercise the utmost tenderness towards the infirmities of his brethren !

And to enforce upon His people a habit of charitable judgment, our blessed Lord calls upon them to look within.

Vv. 3, 4 and 5. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye ? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye ? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

The word here translated "mote," might have

been better rendered "a splinter," which, as opposed to a beam in our own eye, is intended to point out that we are more disposed to dwell upon and to exaggerate slight faults in our neighbour, than seriously to reflect upon the still weightier and more important defects with which we ourselves are chargeable. This is not in accordance with the charity of the gospel, which views with tenderness the faults of others, and watches with rigour and severity over its own. Which of us has not a beam in his own eye? If, then, our own sins and shortcomings be so numerous and aggravated, calling for unceasing prayer and unwearied watchfulness, that we may be delivered from their guilt, and their presence, and their power, why pry into and examine the faults of our neighbour? In the one exercise there is profit, in the other there is sin. We are spending our time and our energies in cultivating the vineyards of others, while we are leaving our own altogether neglected. Nay, commonly those very persons who are most completely under the dominion of sin are most censorious in judging their neighbour. They say to their brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in their own eye. What presumption is this, and what melancholy blindness as to their real state! The Searcher of Hearts pronounces it to be hypocrisy. "Thou hypocrite," says Christ. The man is pretending to hate sin, to be a vigorous up-

holder of the holiness of the law of God, and therefore he would visit the slightest fault in another with relentless punishment. But is there any sincerity in all this? If he hated sin in reality, would not that hatred first of all display itself in the deepest sorrow of heart, and bitter repentance because of his own sins? The spirit of his prayer would not be, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," but "God be merciful to me a sinner." Godly sorrow so occupies the thoughts, so absorbs the feelings, that the really humbled penitent has no time, and no inclination to be harshly blaming the faults of his neighbours. He feels his own sin to be a heavy burden, greater than he is able to bear. He may notice blemishes in others, but then he feels that he himself is all covered with sores, that there is no soundness in him. His first, his chief, his all-absorbing anxiety is that the beam may be taken out of his own eye. "Lord, pardon mine iniquity," is his earnest prayer, "for it is very great." There is no disposition in him now to think lightly of his sin. He has seen it, he has felt it, he abhors it. Let a man be truly convicted of sin by the Spirit of God; let his eyes be opened to see it as that abominable thing which God hateth, and then, feeling that he needs so much to be forgiven of God, such a one will not be cruel and unmerciful in his judgment of others. On the contrary, his own sin appears to him in such a light, that he

is disposed to think all men less sinful and unworthy than himself.

Besides, how can the hypocritical formalist, whose eye is darkened by sin, judge impartially of the state of his fellow-men? "The spiritual man judgeth all things, but he himself is judged of no man." The faculty of spiritual discernment belongs only to the man who is born from above. He has "the unction from the Holy One, and he knoweth all things." We must be acquainted with our own hearts, and have received an enlightened knowledge of the holy law of God before we are prepared to judge rightly of the feelings and conduct of our fellow-men. But a man who is habitually under the power of evil principles and passions and desires, is blinded by the god of this world, and cannot possibly judge righteous judgment. To what standard of judgment can he appeal? To the Word of God, in its true spiritual meaning, he is a stranger, and his conscience is perverted by sin. Whatever judgments he may form, then, can scarcely be other than false, and he is fast verging towards that state of judicial blindness in which he will "call good evil, and evil good." And how can he reprove his neighbour without meeting with the instant return, "Physician heal thyself." "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

What, then, is the doctrine of Christ in reference to judging and reprovng our neighbour? We are not called upon to shut our eyes to the sins of our neighbour, and to stand by, and, without remonstrance, see the law of God openly violated. No. This were to become "partakers of other men's sins." We must judge, but with caution and kindness, not in a malicious condemning spirit; we must reprove, but with meekness and gentleness, and under a deep impression of our own sinfulness. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." The duty is plain and imperative,—“Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” But it is to the spirit in which the duty is to be discharged that the Redeemer especially points our attention in the passage before us. Sin must be felt, he warns us, and lamented and repented of in our own hearts, before we are in a fit state to rebuke our fellow-men with consistency and with success. Ah! If we would benefit others we must set a watch over ourselves. Every sin that is cherished, every evil disposition that is harboured in the soul, every evil practice that is

indulged in the life, is an Achan in the camp, that not only retards our own progress, but tends to weaken, and, to a certain extent, to defeat our exertions in the cause of the Redeemer. How much need have we then to examine ourselves, and to strive and pray that we may be enabled to walk humbly, closely, and circumspectly with our God, lest any root of bitterness springing up should trouble us, and thereby many should be defiled.

But while it is a solemn Christian duty, at once to “have compassion on the ignorant, and to warn them that are unruly,” to “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine,” the utmost prudence is necessary in the discharge of this duty. Hence the exhortation of our Lord—

V. 6. “Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

Dogs and swine, both of them unclean animals under the law, are employed here to indicate those who are so thoroughly sensual, and worldly, and alienated from the life of God, that they hate the truth and trample it under foot. To speak to such persons of holy things is to expose them to profanation : hence the language of Solomon—“He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame.” This, of course, does not apply to the public preaching of the truth. When a minister

mounts the pulpit, he is bound to proclaim the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. "Necessity is laid upon me," says the apostle; "yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." There may be those in his audience who will cast the holy thing away from them as utterly worthless and despicable, who will trample the pearl under their feet, and turn again and revile the faithful messenger of God. But his duty remains unaffected by the manner in which his message is received: he must "cry aloud and spare not." The exhortation of Christ in this passage, however, seems to be directed rather to private dealings with men, than to the public proclamation of the truth. An ardent zeal for the good of souls, and an anxiety to win them over to a reception of the truth as it is in Jesus, may sometimes lead us to be imprudently indiscriminate in urging the gospel upon the acceptance of men. Zeal must be tempered with discretion and Christian prudence. "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing;" but our Lord wishes all His people to be regulated by sound wisdom and understanding in the fear of the Lord. It is right to be instant in season and out of season in the work of Christ; but there are cases in which the call of the gospel may be so obstinately resisted, that nothing remains for us but to shake the dust from our feet against such determined enemies of the gospel, and to pass to those who will more

readily receive the message of eternal life. It is a very solemn matter to withhold the gospel call from any one, and ought not to be resorted to except in extreme cases; and yet that there are cases of this kind the language of Christ plainly shews. We may lose much time and labour upon those who are obstinately opposed to the truth and to the faithful preacher of the truth. Such people are neither prepared to appreciate the message, nor to welcome the messenger: they would wish the ministers of Christ to speak to them smooth things, and to prophesy deceits. "The time will come," the apostle warns us, "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." But still the exhortation is pressed upon Timothy even in the view of such circumstances, "watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." The picture which John Bunyan hath given of a faithful minister of the Lord Jesus is singularly beautiful and accurate. "He has his eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand; the law of truth is written upon his lips; the world is behind his back; he stands as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold hangs over his head." His position is at once an honourable, a difficult, and a delicate one. He must be bold and fearless as a

lion, wise as a serpent, harmless and gentle as a dove. Brethren, pray for us. We need your prayers "that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified."

1. How searching are the exhortations of Christ! They shew clearly that He knows well what is in man. His Word pierces even to the dividing asunder the very joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Man judgeth only after the outward appearance. Well, therefore, might an apostle declare,—“It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man’s judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self; but He that judgeth me is the Lord.” The Redeemer, when persecuted by men, “committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” If then our judgment be so liable to err, “let us not judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no one lay a stumbling-block in his brother’s way.”

2. This subject shews us the paramount importance of self-examination. Each one of us, on the great day, must bear his own burden, and therefore we ought to look well to our own state and character before God. “Examine yourselves,” says an apostle, “whether ye be in the faith.”

3. We see here also the danger of persisting in a determined opposition to the truth. “The god of this world blinds the minds of those that believe not.”

Every day they become less disposed to come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd. This will be the condemnation of multitudes, that "light hath come into the world, and yet they have loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil." Could matters be compromised, so that sin and salvation could both be retained, then their aversion to the gospel would be to some extent diminished. But the opposition between the two they feel to be absolutely insuperable; and seeing, therefore, that they love sin, they have no other alternative but to bury themselves in hopeless and impenetrable darkness. The choice is made accordingly and persisted in, after many struggles, it may be, on the part of conscience, and after having listened to many earnest remonstrances from the Word of God. Every opportunity of prolonging the reign of ignorance in the soul is eagerly embraced, and the light of divine truth is carefully excluded from the mind. Such persons at length realise the melancholy description of the prophet,— "Having eyes, but they see not; ears, but they hear not, and hearts, but they do not understand." This is the last, the most hopeless stage of unbelief, when the gospel is rejected as an idle tale, the pearl of great price is trampled under foot, and the messenger of God who would press it upon their acceptance is treated with insult and disdain. Is this the position of any reader of this work? Be warned even et.

Your day of grace is now near its close, and the Spirit of God, if you repent not, will, ere long, render applicable to you the command,—“ Give not that which is holy unto dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

SECTION II.—FELT WEAKNESS AND URGENT PRAYER.

MAT. VII. 7-12.

It is impossible to reflect seriously on the high and holy principles of action by which Jesus, throughout this Sermon on the Mount, wishes His people to be regulated, without being deeply affected with a sense of our own sins and imperfections. “ The law” of God, more especially when explained by the mouth of Jesus, is felt by the believer to be “ holy,” but he is compelled, on a consideration of his own character, as contrasted with the law, to take up the language of the apostle, and to say, “ The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Jesus knew well, while he gave forth His warnings and exhortations, that His true disciples were liable to be discouraged, as if it were impossible ever to reach the lofty standard which He set before them. And, therefore, knowing what was passing in their minds, He hastens to point out a

never-failing source of comfort and strength amid all their conscious weakness and unworthiness.

V. 7. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

In these words Jesus leads His people to the mercy-seat. He shews them that it is alike their duty and their privilege to go to a throne of grace, and there, with believing confidence, perseverance, and importunity, to implore mercy to pardon and grace to help them in every time of need. The remedy for the believer's weakness is a simple and an effectual one : "Ask, and it shall be given you." If you wish an explanation, then, why indwelling sin is, in many cases, so powerful, and grace so feeble, we find it in the statement of the Apostle James, founded on the passage we are now considering, "Ye fight, and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." How soul-refreshing the declaration of John, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us ; and if we know that He hear us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." But there is a qualifying clause in this quotation from the epistle of James which calls upon us to consider attentively wherein lies the force of the Redeemer's exhortation. The certainty of the receiving is made simply to rest upon the asking. Yet we find the

Apostle James saying,—“Ye ask and receive not.” We startle as if there were an obvious contradiction between the Lord and his apostle. But we are instantly relieved from our difficulty, by the explanation of James, “Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” The whole force of the text, then, lies in the nature of the asking. All prayer is not true, acceptable prayer. Hence the necessity of the indwelling operation of the Spirit to “help our infirmities,” and to enable us to offer up “the inwrought fervent prayer of a righteous man, which availeth much.” “Prayer,” says our Larger Catechism, “is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of the Spirit;” and such a prayer shall assuredly receive its answer in due time. Thus our Lord assures us, John xvi. 23 and 24, “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” The language of the Redeemer in urging prayer upon His people is peculiarly emphatic, and every word gathers strength as we proceed. We must “ask” under a felt consciousness of our wants; we must “seek” with an earnest desire to obtain the blessing; we must “knock” with the utmost energy and importunity that we may not

be shut out from it. And every exercise of believing prayer shall be met, on the part of our Heavenly Father, with a communication of grace corresponding to the grace which has prompted the prayer. Or, as it is expressed in

V. 8, "For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

In support of the truth of the general promise, Jesus here points to the uniform experience of every praying Christian. His prayers have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and they shall assuredly be answered, not perhaps in the manner and at the time he could have wished, but as his all-wise and all-loving Father sees to be best for him. It is His will not ours that must regulate the bestowment of any blessing whatever. Paul prayed that the Lord would remove from him his thorn in the flesh. He came again and again to a throne of grace with this earnest petition. At length his prayer was answered, not by the removal of the needful trial, but by the communication of the gracious promise to the apostle's fainting soul, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." God often delays giving that we may "ask," and "seek," and "knock," that we may persevere in prayer, and in the use of the appointed means, and when He hath

sufficiently tried our faith and patience, He will not withhold the blessing. But it ought never to be forgotten that the dispensation under which believers are placed in this world is of a very peculiar kind. It is regulated by the pervading law, "All things work together for *good* to them that love God;" but that *good* extends not only to our temporal comfort and happiness in this world, but to our eternal happiness in the world to come. Our wisdom, therefore, lies in praying only for things according to the will of God, committing all into His hands, and entreating that He would order all for His own glory and our good.

The promise is an extensive one, "*Every one* that asketh, receiveth." "God is no respecter of persons." "In every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him." All are welcome to the footstool. O that all were as willing as they are welcome! Every one is invited to come in faith, and he will not be sent empty away. And not only shall prayer ultimately receive its answer, but in the very act of believing prayer, there is a communication of grace from on high. "For he that asketh, receiveth." Receiving and realizing the promise, we enter immediately into the possession of it. On this principle, "he that believeth *doth* enter into life."

It is not without a purpose that our blessed Lord uses three different terms to denote the act of believing prayer. We must "ask," and "whatsoever we

ask believing, we shall receive." Asking supposes faith, a firm believing confidence that for the sake of Jesus we shall obtain the desires of our hearts. When we think of the infinite value and perfect efficacy and acceptableness of the work of Christ, we cannot fail to perceive that there is a firm foundation on which to rest our confident assurance of the acceptance of our persons and our prayers. "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 vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an 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."

And not only must we ask in faith, but we must "seek," implying that, along with the exercise of believing prayer, we must be diligent in the use of the appointed means whereby we may obtain the blessing sought. When we go to the footstool and spread out our requests before God, we are pledging ourselves that in so far as we are concerned we shall leave no means untried to obtain what we desire. In faithfully following out this course we shall certainly realize the truth of the saying of the missionary Elliott, that "prayer and pains will accomplish anything."

And farther, while we ask in faith and seek in the

diligent use of means we must also knock with persevering importunity. Jesus wishes His people to "pray always and not to faint." Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. All believers are called Israel, because, like Him, they are princes with God, who by dint of holy earnestness and importunity prevail with Him. They will not let Him go until He bless them. He invites His people to this holy wrestling, and He assures us that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

That earnest, believing, importunate prayer will assuredly be answered, might be argued from the very nature of God. He hath proclaimed Himself to be the hearer and the answerer of prayer. He never said to any one of the seed of Jacob seek ye my face in vain. He is not only the greatest but the kindest, the tenderest, the best of beings. God is LOVE. And under what title hath our blessed Redeemer taught us to address a reconciled God in prayer? "Our Father which art in heaven." If then ye have ever known on earth a father's love, or experienced a father's care, endeavour from such an imperfect and necessarily feeble emblem to rise to the contemplation of the care, and the tenderness, and the kindness of your Father in heaven.

It is from the relation existing between the father and the imploring child that the Redeemer argues in the passage before us :—

Vv. 9 and 10. "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Even the mere promptings of natural affection in a father's heart lead him to grant the reasonable entreaties of a loving and obedient child. "If his son ask bread," which is absolutely necessary for his bodily support, would his father mock him by giving him a stone; or if he ask a fish, which is suitable and healthful food, would he answer his request by giving him a serpent, which might injure and perhaps destroy him? Such conduct were contrary to the plainest dictates of natural reason and feeling. The Redeemer accordingly taking this for granted thus argues:—

V. 11. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" This verse contains much precious truth, and is fitted to afford much comfort to believers in drawing near to their heavenly Father. It proceeds, you observe, on the assumption that in the constitution of man, fallen and depraved though he be, there are remnants still of what is amiable, and kind, and loving. Parental affection is found to glow in the bosom of even the most wicked and abandoned of men. It is one of those instincts of our nature

which seem to survive the wreck of all the rest. And if amid the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, there is a sharp-sighted sagacity in discerning, and an irrepressible promptness in supplying, the wants of our children, how much more shall God, who is infinitely good in Himself, and the very origin and author of all that is good upon the earth; whose regard for his redeemed children, far from being like the parental affection in man, a mere instinctive feeling, is regulated by unerring wisdom and unspotted holiness; how much more, we say, shall God give good things to them that ask Him? It is contrary to the strongest feelings of our nature that a parent should give his child what is useless, or what would be injurious to him; and how much more are we warranted in believing that the All-wise, who knows with unerring certainty what is best, will give, as He knows how to give, good things to His praying children. The expectation of the child of God has here a wide range, "good things," all that is truly good, not in the estimation of man, but in the estimation of God. Luke, in a parallel passage to that before us, names in express terms that gift which comprehends all good gifts, xi. 13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" The Holy Spirit is the Author of all that is good in man, and in re-

ceiving the Spirit we obtain possession of all that is truly good for us, nay, we have the earnest of the purchased inheritance.

If, then, the promise given to believing prayer be so extensive, yet so certain, why are our corruptions so strong, and our graces so languishing? Why does sin exercise such power in our hearts, and why do our enemies so often triumph over us? Why do we realise so little of God in our religious duties, and why are we so far from enjoying God as the chief treasure of our souls? Why have we so little of the mind that was in Christ Jesus? Why so uncharitable, ungenerous, and unkind in our dealings with our fellow-men? Why so little, in short, of the life of God in our souls, of the love of God in our hearts, or the peace of God in our bosoms, or the image of God in our lives? Is it not written,—“Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it?” We are not straitened in God then, we are straitened in our own souls. Were we only more earnest, more fervent, more persevering in believing prayer, we would find the fruit of it in a visible growth in grace, a manifest advancement in holiness.

SECTION III.—UNIVERSAL EQUITY.

MAT. VII. 12.

In the passage we have considered in the previous

section, Jesus has been appealing to our own nature, as an argument in favour of believing prayer, and He proceeds to lay down a rule founded on the same nature, whereby to regulate our conduct to our fellow-men.

V. 12. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets."

This is the winding up of that part of the Redeemer's exhortations to His people, in reference to their conduct in social life. The radical evil of the human heart is selfishness, and the great object and tendency of the Word of God is to subdue and gradually eradicate that depraved principle. It is important that we should bear in mind that there are two principles which are sometimes confounded together, self-love and selfishness. The one is a necessary and inherent part of the human constitution ; the other, a vicious tendency engrafted upon it by the fall. Self-love is that instinctive principle by which we are impelled to seek our own preservation and the promotion of our own happiness. Selfishness, on the other hand, is inordinate self-love, prompting us to promote our own comfort, and to advance our own interest at the expense of our neighbour. Against this last principle the whole of the second table of the law is obviously directed,—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Presuming that self-love is a necessary part of our constitution, it calls upon us to make this a standard by which we are to regulate our conduct to our neighbour. The exhortation which Christ here gives is simply an expansion of this general rule, laying down in what way the rule is to be applied. We are commanded to suppose ourselves in the same situation with our neighbour, and to reflect how we would wish him to act towards us, and, having candidly and honestly, as in the sight of God, decided how we, if in his circumstances, would wish him to act towards us, we may safely adopt the same line of conduct towards him. This is what is termed the golden rule, a rule of duty which any Christian may readily adopt in any case where his neighbour is concerned. The rule is not so safe in the hands of an unregenerate man, simply because his mind not being enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God, he is apt to be blinded by selfishness even in his application of this admirable rule. A worldly master, for example, is liable to have his mind so deeply engrossed with a desire to advance his own interests, that he is in imminent danger of trenching upon the rights, and neglecting the comfort of his servants. Let him be called upon to apply the golden rule, and to exchange places in idea with his servant, he will not be able even in this way to arrive at a proper sense of what is due to those who are placed under him.

But the defect, you observe, is not in the rule, the rule is a perfect one ; the defect lies in the perverted heart and conscience of the man who is applying the rule. The chief advantage of such a rule as this is that it is of easy application. The standard is within us. We have simply to judge of our probable feelings in certain supposed circumstances, and to regulate our conduct accordingly. But it must appear plain that if the standard by which we are here commanded to regulate our duty is within us, then we must see to it that the standard itself be in some measure correct ; and this can only be when we are renewed by the Spirit of God. The child of God is not left to be guided only by the variable feelings of his own heart, but the Word of God, that unerring standard of all duty, is “ a light unto his feet and a lamp unto his path.” Ever and anon therefore, he is rectifying the standard of feeling within by the standard of duty without, and being somewhat assimilated in principles and feeling to the Word and the image of God, he can make a safe and an easy and a profitable application of the golden rule. The Christian master has no difficulty in exchanging places in imagination with his servant, or the Christian judge with the criminal at his bar, or the Christian king with the meanest of his subjects. But it is not so with the unbeliever. He knows not what is right whether in his present or altered circumstances. He is utterly at fault as to the proper

line of duty in any case. The inward standard is wrong, and the outward standard is neglected. True, he has a conscience, but it is not enlightened by the Spirit of the living God. He must undergo an entire change both of mind and of heart, otherwise he can make no use even of the golden rule unless to pervert and to abuse it.

The exhortation of Christ, however, may be considered not only as a rule by which we may discover the proper line of duty towards our neighbours, but it may also be considered as a positive command. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets." This is simply, as we have remarked, a repetition of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is the mode in which the love is to be carried into operation. We are to consider as Christian men, under the law to Christ, what is due to our neighbour, and lest a spirit of selfishness should influence our decision, we are commanded to suppose the decision as applied not to our neighbour, but to ourselves placed in the situation of our neighbour, and when we have thus cautiously and guardedly ascertained the line of duty, we may safely follow it. The reason why we are exhorted to follow this process, is simply to overcome, or rather to hold in check that spirit of consummate selfishness which so tenaciously adheres to our nature. So extensively did this

vicious element prevail even among the primitive Christians, that we find the apostle complaining in his Epistle to the Church at Philippi that "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." While men are strangers to the regenerating power of divine grace, this is the prevailing, the all-pervading principle. Even their boasted benevolence is simply another form of refined selfishness. And as the work of sanctification in the Christian is progressive there does remain a considerable mixture of selfishness, which is liable to pervert his views in reference to his duty to his neighbour. Christ knows what is in man, and assuredly no wiser, no more appropriate command could be issued to sum up our duty to others than the rule now before us. "Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even so to them." This is applicable in all circumstances, and to all persons. It comprehends all the duties of the second table of the law, those which refer to our fellow-men.

"For this is the law and the prophets." Such is the express statement of the Redeemer. He has been enforcing with the utmost earnestness our duties to our neighbour, and He lays down the golden rule in conclusion as the sum of the whole, declaring that this is the essence of all that the law and the prophets, or the whole Old Testament Scriptures, teach upon this important department of duty. In the same sense, the apostle Paul, speaking upon this subject, says,—“Love

worketh no ill to his neighbour ; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

When we look at the strictness of the law of God as explained by Christ, we may be ready to exclaim, “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ” The law is obviously so spiritual, and we so carnal, that we might be liable to despair. But He who issues the command points out to us the quarter from which we may receive strength to obey it. He is ready out of His own inexhaustible fulness to impart grace for grace. Let us go then to the mercy-seat, and praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, we shall be enabled by grace to love God and to love our brother also.

Nor need we be afraid lest our prayers may not be answered. That feeling of helplessness which throws us on our knees is the work of the Spirit, and He hath brought us to the footstool that He may enrich our souls with grace. The Spirit excites no desire which He does not mean to gratify ; He dictates no prayer which He does not mean to answer. “ Be not afraid then, O ye of little faith.” The path of duty may often be difficult ; you may have often occasion to lament your weakness and unworthiness, but this very feeling ought to lead you to rest all the more firmly on the merits and mediation of the Son of God, and it ought to fill your heart with the comfortable assurance that your prayers for Christ’s sake shall be heard and

answered. There are no blessings which on this ground you are not privileged to ask, and there are no blessings which He has not pledged Himself to bestow. He has given you Christ, and with Him you may rest assured He will freely give you all things. "Be no longer faithless then but believing."

And while you commune much with God in earnest, believing prayer, let the fruit of your prayers be seen in your cautious, circumspect walk in the world. The face of Moses shone when he came down from the Mount ; let your souls shine, reflecting the glorious image of Christ, and let every lineament of the Saviour's likeness be so apparent, that "all may take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus," that you have learned "of Him who is meek and lowly of heart, and have found rest unto your souls." Live in love, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

PRÁCTICAL APPLICATION.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

CHAPTER I.

NECESSITY OF STRIVING TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

MAT. VII. 13-20.

WE have now concluded the consideration of the two great divisions of the Sermon on the Mount, the one relating to the righteousness of the Scribes, the other to the righteousness of the Pharisees ; and it only remains that we consider the important and impressive practical exhortations with which our blessed Redeemer closes this truly instructive discourse. His chief design in addressing His hearers from the Mount was to explain and enforce the true nature and principles of the kingdom of God, or that eternal life which, begun on earth, is consummated in heaven. And as a fitting conclusion to the whole He urges the absolute necessity of strenuous exertion in pressing into the kingdom and seeking to overcome the numerous obstacles which hindered their entrance into life.

Vv. 13 and 14. "Enter ye in at the strait gate : for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth

to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat : because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

The grand object at which Jesus exhorts all men habitually to aim, and after which He exhorts them to strive, is, that they may obtain "life" and avoid "destruction" or eternal death. Both are represented as splendid mansions. The road to the one is narrow, and the gate of entrance strait; the road to the other is broad, and the gate of entrance wide. Few find admission to the one; multitudes crowd into the other. The one is a mansion of eternal bliss, the other a mansion of eternal woe. Employing this figure then our Lord exhorts all to "enter in at the strait gate," or, as it is still more strongly expressed by Luke, "strive," or agonize, contend as in a combat, to enter in, evidently conveying the idea of extreme difficulty. The same idea is represented throughout the whole of the Sacred Scriptures. We must "fight," "labour," wrestle," "run," if we would "lay hold on eternal life." There must be an effort of faith, and an effort so strong as to overcome all difficulties, to surmount all obstacles, and to press into the kingdom. "For the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The language of this passage is evidently designed to intimate that there are many difficulties in the way

of our salvation. It is right, however, that we should reflect from what quarter these difficulties arise. God Himself puts no hindrances in the way of our entrance into heaven. He "would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Every legal obstacle is removed out of the way. The work of Christ is perfect. All the demands of law and of justice are fully satisfied. Heaven is "a purchased possession," freely offered to all who will accept it. Whence then arises the difficulty of entering into life? It arises, not from God, but entirely and exclusively from ourselves. The gate is strait and the road is narrow, because we ourselves are unwilling to enter in. The hindrances then, we remark, are of different kinds, but all of them more or less connected with that condition to which we have reduced ourselves.

1. They arise directly from our own depraved nature. Originally the heart of man was an emblem of heaven. God dwelt in it as in a holy temple. But since the fall it has become a habitation of devils. "The imaginations of the thoughts of the heart are only evil, and that continually." Ignorance clouds the understanding, so that we neither know ourselves nor the way of eternal life. Unbelief hardens the heart, so that the truth cannot find a lodgement there, and accordingly the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that "they could not enter in because of unbelief;" and even after this obstacle is overcome, there is "a law

in the members warring against the law of the mind, and bringing it into captivity to the law of sin and of death." The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all exercise their ascendancy in the soul. Our tendency to evil and our aversion to good, are naturally so strong, that we are compelled to subscribe to the truth of the apostle's statement, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And even after the enmity of the heart has been slain, how many obstacles are there to the progress of sanctification in the converted soul! Pride, prejudice, evil passions, wicked inclinations, unhallowed desires, all operate powerfully in retarding the work of grace, and make the experience of Paul familiar to every child of God; Rom. vii. 15-19: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Thus it is that "the gate is strait," and "the road is narrow" through the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart. And we remark,

2. That in connection with the natural state of the heart, the appointed road to heaven is difficult. The commencing process, that of conversion, is so completely opposed to the carnal nature that violence must be done to the strongest tendencies of the human heart. "Except we be converted, and become as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God." So complete is the change that it is termed a turning from darkness unto light, from death unto life, from the power of Satan to the service of God. And as conversion is difficult, repentance is painful, the mortification of sin requires strenuous exertion. It is no easy matter to cut off a right hand and to pluck out a right eye, that we may enter into life. And how arduous the work which is set before the man that follows Christ! He must "deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus." He must be engaged in a daily and hourly process of dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. He must be crucifying "the flesh, with its affections and lusts." He must "resist even unto blood, striving against sin." He must ever be seeking to grow in grace, and to "perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord." And further,

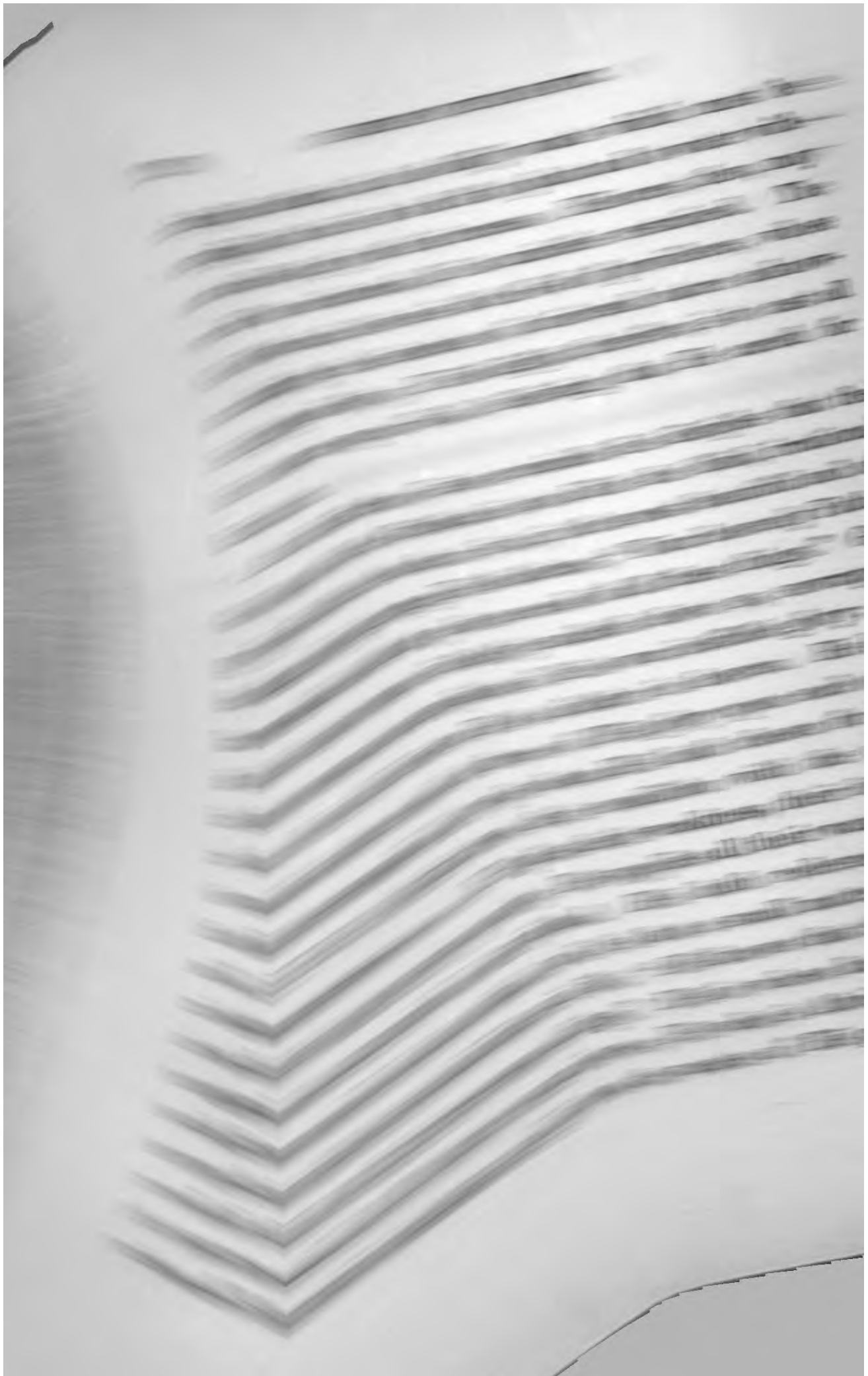
3. The powerful opposition to which the Christian is exposed increases the difficulty. The enemies of the believer are numerous and powerful. The devil, who is emphatically styled the Tempter—the world, with its manifold allurements—and the flesh, with its

unhallowed desires, all are combined in one unholy compact to rob him, if it were possible, of his crown. No opportunity is lost, no means are left untried, that the child of God may be weakened, discouraged, and defeated. If he could only be made to sink in despair by the way, and could be prevented from obtaining an entrance into the incorruptible inheritance, the purpose of his enemies would be fully gained. But explicit and sure is the declaration of Christ. "None of them shall ever perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Father's hand."

If, then, the difficulties which lie in the way of our entrance into heaven be so numerous; if the "gate" be so "strait" and the "road" so "narrow," how suitable the exhortation of Jesus! He knows the obstacles which beset our path; He knows the strenuous and persevering exertions which are necessary on our part, and, therefore, He calls upon us, with the utmost earnestness, to "strive to enter in at the strait gate." You perceive the point towards which our efforts are to be directed. It is not to the rendering of the gate wider, or the way broader; not entertaining the vain imagination that, by our own righteousness, we can establish a title to heaven, or that we can add anything to the already finished work of Christ. But all our efforts are to be directed towards the pressing to enter in at the gate, strait though it

be, and to walk in the road to life, narrow though it be. The effort we are called to make, is not one of works but one of faith. We must seek so to realize the testimony of God in regard to His Son, that we shall press through all obstacles to a simple reception of, and a confident trust in Christ and His salvation. In this holy exercise of faith we are doing violence to the whole tendencies of the unrenewed man. Self-righteousness, pride, vain-glory, worldly-mindedness, all must give way before the strong effort of a simple, exclusive faith. Holy men, in all ages, have been men in whom faith was a powerful, energetic principle. Abraham was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." The faith of Job could say, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" and Paul could take up the strong language, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." No mere theoretic faith will avail us anything. It must be a living, active, efficient principle, so firmly uniting the soul to Christ, that we shall be enabled to overcome all difficulties, and to "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of our God in Christ Jesus."

After the explanation we have now given of the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way that leads unto life, the words of Christ cannot appear strange: "Few there be that find it." Multi-



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tudes are quite contented to remain in their present state, "far from God," and strangers to heaven. They see no necessity for making such efforts as those we have been speaking of; and all earnestness in religion they regard as fanaticism. Others have occasional thoughts on the subject of religion, but they cannot come to the decided resolution of walking in the narrow way. The restraint, they think, would be too great; the self-denial and mortification of sin too difficult; and, therefore, they give themselves up to carelessness and unconcern. Few there be that find the way of life, because few, with true sincerity of heart, begin to seek it.

But the Evangelist Luke represents our Lord as adding, "For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." We must not understand this as spoken of those who truly seek the Lord: "For I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain." "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." But our Lord is evidently referring to the multitudes of mere nominal professors of Christianity, who content themselves with a slight attention to the ordinances of religion, without any earnest effort or exertion to enter into heaven.

Others are not able to enter in, because they are not contented to walk in the only appointed way of admission into glory. "I am the door," says Christ. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man

cometh unto the Father but by me." It is not enough to be concerned about salvation in any way, we must be striving to enter in by the right way.

Others finally will not be able to enter in, because they have delayed until it is now too late. The time of entering in, the day of our merciful visitation, is limited. The hour is coming when those who have refused the offered Saviour, who have sinned away the day of grace, and are doomed to find that the gates of heaven are shut against them, will discover their error when it is beyond remedy. They will cry with agonizing earnestness, "Lord, Lord, open unto us; but He will say unto them, I never knew you."

Not only, however, does our Lord enforce His urgent call upon us to be earnest, diligent, and unwearied in striving to enter into heaven, by pointing out to us the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way that leads to life, and the small number of those who shall ultimately find it, but He also enforces His earnest exhortation, by pointing out to us how "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and that many there be who go in thereat." If the straitness of the gate and the narrowness of the way were intended to point out to us the difficulty of finding an admission into eternal blessedness, the wideness of the gate and the broadness of the way that leads to destruction are intended to

show that the way to hell is easy. Our nature prompts us to what is evil; we have only to follow our own inclinations, to walk after the sight of our own eyes, and after the imaginations of our own hearts, and our destruction is certain. If we follow the multitude it will be to do evil. We have only to give unrestrained licence to our sinful appetites and passions, to live as the world live, and to seek our enjoyment upon the earth—we have only to do the works of the Devil, and to serve divers lusts and pleasures, and we shall find the road to eternal death smooth, easy, and rapid. Our companions will be many, our hindrances few. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”

How earnest should we be in seeking to enter into life! Two roads are here set before us; the one leads to life and the other to death; the one is narrow, the other broad; along the one few are travelling, while the other is crowded with eager and anxious multitudes. We ask you, then, reader, to make your choice; make it deliberately, firmly, decidedly. If you come not to a decision in this world, God will determine the matter for you, and assign you a portion with the wicked.

Our Lord proceeds to remind His hearers of one grand hindrance in the way of their entering into life. We have many difficulties from within, and we have one grand obstacle that meets us from without,

damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

The false teachers are often referred to with the view of warning believers against their erroneous doctrine. It is in this aspect that the Apostle John exhorts, 1st John iv. 1-3, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." This passage obviously sanctions the grand Protestant principle of the right of private judgment, authorizing, nay, commanding us, like the good Bereans of old, to "search the Scriptures, whether these things are so." Both ministers and people must refer to the same unerring standard of truth, and every statement from the mouth of weak, erring man must be rejected, unless it can be borne out by—Thus saith the Lord.

It is not, however, to the doctrine of the false teachers that our blessed Redeemer seems in this passage chiefly to refer, but to their character and conduct. They are spoken of as hypocrites, "coming in sheep's clothing, while inwardly they are ravening

wolves." The expression, "sheep's clothing," is used to denote the coarse, simple dress of the ancient prophets. Accordingly, the prophet Zephaniah uses a similar expression in speaking of false prophets, "they wear a rough garment to deceive;" and our Lord says of the Scribes, "they love to walk in long robes." The intention of our Lord, obviously, is to describe these teachers as assuming the garb and appearance of the prophets of God, while inwardly they are seeking only their own advantage, and their own honour among men. They "seek the praise of men, and not the honour that cometh from God only." Such men are not harmless, they are deeply injurious to the sheep of Christ. They are ravening wolves, seeking the fleece and not the flock—tearing and devouring the flock of Christ—"greedy dogs, that cannot have enough."

Our blessed Lord lays down a test by which such false teachers may be known.

Vv. 16-18. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." In judging of a tree you may be deceived by the appearance of its bark, and its leaves, and its branches, and its blos-

soms, but "by their fruits ye shall know them." This is the test of the quality of the tree. And by this test Jesus wishes that all His ministers and all His people should be tried. The fruits that grow upon a tree of the Lord's planting are the fruits of the Spirit of God, which are plainly laid down in Gal. v. 22-24: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." In proof of the accuracy of the test which Jesus proposes He appeals to the common experience of men. We expect the fruit invariably to correspond with the nature of the tree. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" And our Lord assures us that, in this instance, the experience of men is founded on a sound principle. For "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." The fruit of the tree is its natural produce; and if the heart of a man has been really renewed by the Spirit of God, the fruits of righteousness will be brought forth, to the praise and the glory of Christ. But if any man, whether an office-bearer or a private member of the Church of Christ, be destitute of the grace of God in his heart, the fruits will speedily manifest themselves in

an unholy and unsanctified life. "Will he always call upon God?" is the emphatic question which Job asks concerning the hypocrite. He may be outwardly zealous before man, but the exercises of the closet will be few, cold, and formal. The fruit will be speedily apparent in his life and conversation. The tree is corrupt, and it will soon be seen that its fruit is evil. And mark the end:

V. 19. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Not only is the man who brings forth evil fruit doomed to be punished, but every man who bringeth not good fruit. Many content themselves with a kind of negative Christianity. They think it quite enough if they do no injury to their fellow-men. But the commandment of God is exceeding broad. It requires that true Christians should be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world: holding forth the word of life." Both the Christian minister and the Christian man ought to strive and pray, not merely that they may be negatively harmless, but positively good, manifesting in their whole conduct and character the sanctifying influence of that truth which they profess to believe. But if in the all-seeing and heart-searching eye of Jehovah, the fruit shall be found not unto holi-

ness, whatever may have been the outward profession, that tree shall be hewn down by the Great Husbandman and cast into the fire. It is an unprofitable tree in the Lord's vineyard, and therefore it will be cut down as a cumberer of the ground. The same figure is used by John the Baptist in reference to the whole Jewish nation, Matt. iii. 10; "And now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Our Lord having shown the invariable end of every unfruitful minister and professor in the Church of Christ, draws the conclusion—

V. 20. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." It is plain from the whole strain of our Lord's remarks in this searching passage, that we must carry about with us the constant impression that Christianity, if it exist in the soul, will influence the life. Religion is a living, operative principle. Wherever it is found the heart has been changed, a new creation has sprung up in the soul, instead of the thorn has come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar has come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a sign, for an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. In such a case the fruit shall assuredly be unto holiness, and the end shall be everlasting life.

CHAPTER II.

NECESSITY OF BUILDING OUR HAPPINESS AND HOPES ON CHRIST ALONE.

MAT. VII. 21-29.

THE conclusion of this remarkable Sermon on the Mount is peculiarly solemn. Jesus calls upon His hearers to press with all earnestness into the kingdom of God. He warns them that the gate is strait and the road narrow, but still the difficulty of finding access is with Him a powerful argument for diligence, and perseverance, and earnestness on the part of all who would wish to become partakers of the privileges of the kingdom on earth, and to enjoy the eternal blessedness of the kingdom in heaven. The Redeemer next proceeds to remind His hearers of the real character of those who shall at last appear before God in Zion.

V. 21. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

The plain meaning of this passage is, that true acceptable religion does not consist in hypocritical professions of attachment to Christ, but of a sincere and cheerful obedience to His holy will. Jesus must not be understood as here disclaiming the title of Lord, for on another occasion we find Him saying to His disciples, "ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am." And for this very purpose hath Jesus been exalted to the right hand of the Father, "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Nor is it a mere human attainment thus to call Jesus Lord, for an apostle expressly tell us that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." But saying in the text is obviously opposed to doing. It is not with the heart that confession is made in such a case, but with the lips only. So that the question of Christ in the parallel passage of Luke vi. 46, is quite appropriate; "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The use of the word Lord implies submission and dependence, and in the mouth of a true disciple supposes a heart subdued under the power of Christ, and sweetly constrained by His grace. And the repetition of the term Lord, Lord, is intended to denote that the hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks in this passage is of the most aggravated kind. It is no ordinary profession of attachment to His person, and acknowledgment of His authority.

The man who uses this language avows himself to be a loving child, an obedient subject, a devoted friend. He cries Lord, Lord. He has a form of godliness, and that to a remarkable extent; and yet he is totally destitute of its power. He cannot call Jesus Lord by the Holy Ghost, for he has never received "the Spirit of Christ," and therefore "he is none of His."

It follows, then, from the words of the Lord Jesus, that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel. The true disciple of Christ "loves not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." "If ye love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments." His own life, while He dwelt upon the earth, was one uniform expression of obedience to the Divine will. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." This will was to Him supreme; "Not my will, but thine be done." And the will of His Father, which was to Him so dear, He lays down as the only rule of true acceptable obedience, the unerring test of true submission to His own authority. The will of Christ and the will of the Father are one and the same; "Whatsoever the Father doeth, that doeth the Son likewise." Obedience, therefore, to the will of the Father Jesus regards as the badge of true subjection to His own supremacy as Lord of all.

What havoc does such a passage as this make in the visible Church of Christ! It is as if the Great Husbandman had come forth with His fan in His hand

to purge His thrashing-floor, separating the chaff from the wheat. The nominal professor, the formalist, the hypocrite, all disappear in turn, and the true disciples, few in number but strong in faith, enter into the kingdom. Living Christians are a little flock, yet they are heirs of the eternal inheritance. They walk with Christ on earth, and they shall walk with Him in glory. It is only in the great harvest of the world that the true state of multitudes will be known. Jesus, accordingly, points forward to that solemn season :

Vv. 22 and 23. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."

The language in which Christ speaks of the judgment day is peculiar. He terms it "that day," appealing, as it were, to the conscience of every man to explain to what day he particularly referred. It is not a day which can be likened to any other. It stands by itself. "That day." The day of solemn reckoning, when we must all stand before the tribunal of the Great Judge.

Nor does Jesus hesitate to declare Himself the judge of all. "Many will say to *me* in that day: "Then will I profess unto them *I never knew you.*"

And that Jesus Christ will be the judge is the doctrine of the whole Bible. Thus, Acts xvii. 31, "He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead;" and John v. 22, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." So, then, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

The Redeemer represents the whole universe as assembled to receive their final doom. The secrets of all hearts will then be revealed, and Jesus warns us that multitudes will then be found to have been hypocrites of the most melancholy description, deceiving others and themselves deceived. Self-delusion prevails to a far greater extent in the visible Church than we are at all aware. Many there are who are flattering themselves that all is right; they are saying to themselves, Peace, peace, when there is no peace; and they move quietly and securely along the journey of life, little thinking of the hollowness of their profession, until, in an hour when they think not, their soul shall be required of them. They go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand, and they will only become aware of the awful delusion which they have been so long practising upon themselves, when they

are standing at the judgment-seat. The deception is supposed by our blessed Lord to have been carried far, very far. "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied" or taught "in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" There have been instances of brilliant outward manifestations of the power of the Spirit, instances in which His extraordinary gifts have been enjoyed to a remarkable extent, and yet there has been no special communication of His saving, sanctifying grace. Such was the condition of Judas, the betrayer of his Lord; of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; and of Simon Magus, who was baptised by the apostles, and sought to do mighty wonders, while he was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. There has ever been a marked distinction in the Church of Christ between the gifts of the Spirit and the graces of the Spirit; and, accordingly, an apostle, referring to this distinction, says, in 1 Cor. xiii. 1 and 2, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

The possession of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit

seems to have misled the multitudes to whom our Lord here refers, suggesting the thought that, being so highly honoured, they must necessarily be approved of God. It is evident, from the frequency with which it is mentioned, that great importance is attached to the circumstance, that all these wonderful works were performed in the name of Christ. We are not to imagine that, in such cases, the name of Christ was used superstitiously, as in Acts xix. 13-15. "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" It cannot be denied that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have often been really enjoyed and exercised, as by Judas Iscariot, although saving grace has been entirely withheld. But the very circumstance that many, in the early ages of the Church, were enabled to do wonderful works, was eagerly laid hold of as a ground of comfort and of confidence towards God. Just as in the present day, we are convinced there is a deep-seated feeling in the breasts of many who bear the Christian name, that in the regular observance of public and private ordinances, and in the faithful discharge of ordinary duties, without any saving in-

terest in Christ, they may safely look forward to the judgment-day with calmness and composure. But what a reverse of matters will that day bring with it! "The last will then be first, and the first last." The timid, humble disciple who has long been trembling at Jehovah's word, will be received into the joy of his Lord; but the hope of the hypocrite shall then finally perish, and the self-deceiver, who has been long mistaking profession for practice, and gifts for graces, shall hear the awful words from the mouth of Christ, "I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity." These words contain the key to the whole explanation of this marvellous deception which multitudes are practising upon themselves. Christ has never known *them*, and, therefore, they have never known *Him*. They were living in delusion all their days. They mistook the whole arrangements of His providence. They thought that He was shewing them the special tokens of His love, when He was simply manifesting His general benevolence. Judas Iscariot accompanied Jesus; he preached as an apostle; he wrought miracles as an apostle; and up to the eleventh hour, he seemed to differ in nothing from the rest of the apostles. Yet Judas is now in the place of torment, and the apostles are before the throne. Christ had never known Judas, and, accordingly, with all his extraordinary gifts, he betrayed his Lord. "My sheep," says the Redeemer, "hear

my voice, and I know them." This is the commencing point of the believer's history. The rest of it is secure, "they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." "Ye have not chosen me," said He on another occasion, "but I have chosen you." The grand point, then, which it behoves every professing Christian to ascertain, is, Whether he has ever known Christ, or rather, been known of Him. Peculiar gifts, singular advantages, a high Christian profession, will avail us nothing on that day. Eternal bliss or eternal woe will be the portion of any man, according as it is true of him, or otherwise, that he is known of Christ. For "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His."

"I *never* knew you," will be the solemn saying of Christ, to multitudes who will lay claim to be acknowledged as His people on the great day. Had He ever known them, they would never have perished. His knowledge is like His love. "Whom He knows, He knows unto the end." They may lose their sense of His knowledge for a time. They themselves may know Christ but partially, and often lament that they know Him so imperfectly. Here "they know but in part," and they long for that glorious period when they "shall know, even as they are known."

Multitudes, however, "profess to know Christ, while

in works they deny Him," and, accordingly, our blessed Lord declares, that on the day of final reckoning, He will say to all such hollow-hearted and insincere professors, "I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." "By their fruits ye shall know them," is the test which Christ Himself proposes. The general conduct is the best evidence of the state of the heart. The faith of the gospel goes deep into the dispositions, and feelings, and temper, and conduct of a man. If he has known Christ, he has become "a new creature. All old things are done away, and all things are become new." How incumbent is it, then, upon every man who names the name of Christ, to depart from all iniquity!

It is well in us often to anticipate the judgment-day, for if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged. Let us watch narrowly over our own hearts and our own lives, lest we are contenting ourselves with a name to live, while we are spiritually dead; or lest we be coming stately to the ordinances of Christ without ever coming to Christ himself; or lest we are sitting at ease in Zion, forgetting all the time that fearfulness shall surprise the hypocrite, and we may be doomed to hear those awful words from the mouth of a despised and neglected Saviour, "I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity."

And to enforce still farther the absolute necessity of the utmost caution and care in the view of the

judgment-day, the Redeemer closes the Sermon on the Mount by the employment of a beautiful and appropriate figure.

Vv. 24-27. "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

In this passage, the Redeemer likens the professors of Christianity to a man who is engaged in building a house. In a country, which, like Judea, is exposed to severe and sudden storms and inundations, it is of special importance that attention be paid to the foundation on which the structure is reared. This is the main point to which our Lord refers. He makes no allusion to the plan of the building, or the materials of which it consists, but confines the attention of His hearers to one part of the edifice,—the foundation. Two persons are introduced into the similitude or parable. They have one common object,—to erect

a house. The one keeps in view the peculiar dangers to which the building will be exposed; while the other is confining his thoughts simply to his present convenience, and making no provision against the future. Neither of them is ignorant of the nature of the climate, and the sudden and violent storms which must assail their respective houses; yet they set to work in a very different way. The one selects a situation in which he can find a secure and solid foundation; and as Luke expresses it, "he digs deep, and lays the foundation upon a rock." He looks forward to the time when the rains will descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow; and he makes sure that the foundation of his house shall be so deep and so firm that no tempest, however furious and destructive, shall succeed in overthrowing it. The other builder has no regard to coming danger. He chooses a site for his intended dwelling in some pleasant, retired, lovely spot; and, bethinking himself only of present comfort, he proceeds to build, never reflecting whether the foundation on which he is rearing his house be a solid rock, or a bed of shifting sand. The consequences, in both these cases, were such as might have been anticipated. The one building withstood the tempest's wildest fury; the other was shattered to its base. And the reason is plain: The one was founded upon a rock; the other was founded upon the sand. It was this which constituted the grand point

of difference between the two buildings. As long as all was quiet and calm, the buildings might have been pronounced exactly similar. Their general appearance, their plan, their material, their style of architecture were the same. But let the winds howl and the tempests rage, and the mountain torrents rush down with impetuous fury, and the difference between the two buildings becomes obvious at once. The foundation of the one is secure, the foundation of the other is altogether insecure.

This parable is strikingly descriptive of the situation of every professor of Christianity. Each man is engaged in building either for time or for eternity. Jesus teaches us that every thing depends on the foundation, and on the day of solemn retribution our everlasting destiny will turn upon one point, whether we are or are not on the sure foundation. The Word of God plainly assures us that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation : he that believeth shall not make haste." In the view of a judgment-day then, this must be the great subject of inquiry, am I in Christ or am I not? If I am, then, come what may, all is right, but if I am out of Christ, then I am altogether unprepared to meet my God. If we reject Christ, the one sacrifice, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful look-

ing for of judgment and fiery indignation, which will assuredly consume us as adversaries of God. Every other foundation on which a man can build but Christ alone, is a foundation of sand. It cannot bear the weight of the soul's interests for time and eternity. Christ only is a rock, and His work is altogether perfect. Resting on this rock and looking with calm composure into the depths of eternity, an apostle could say, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Our blessed Lord here declares that the man who has founded his house upon a rock, is the man who both heareth the sayings of Christ and doeth them. He has been careful as to the stability of the foundation, and he is careful also as to the security of the building which he erects upon it. He feels that it is absolutely necessary that he be laid upon the living foundation, Christ Jesus, and he feels that it is also necessary, that as a lively stone, he be built up a spiritual house, a holy temple unto the Lord. The resting on Christ and doing the will of Christ are inseparably connected. They are characteristics of the same man. He is united to Christ, and therefore he brings forth fruits unto God. Without Christ, or severed from Him, we can do nothing, nothing that is acceptable, nothing that is pleasing to God. We must first be founded on Christ, the living rock, and then,

by the blessing of the Spirit, we shall grow up in Him unto all things who is the head. But if any man is living in a habitual disregard of the will of Christ, he must assuredly be building his house upon the sand. Christ is not all his salvation, otherwise he would be all his desire.

It is not enough that we have been long hearing the sayings of Christ: Have we a solid, well-grounded hope for eternity? We must look well to our foundation. We have been actively engaged in building, but does our house rest upon the rock of ages? If we have neglected to lay the foundation then we have neglected every thing. We may have been hearing the sayings of Christ, but assuredly we have not been doing them. This is emphatically the will of God, that we believe on Him whom he hath sent. And, therefore, though we may observe many of the commandments of God in the letter, we cannot observe them in the spirit as long as we are strangers to Christ. The man, the only man who hears the sayings of Christ and habitually does them, is the man whose house is built upon the rock, and let the storm beat ever so furiously upon that house it shall nevertheless stand for ever.

Thus have we finished the consideration of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, one of the most beauti-

ful, most copious, and comprehensive statements of gospel truth which the Word of God contains. It was admirably suited to the interesting and peculiar circumstances in which it was spoken, when the shadows of the law were about to disappear before the bright shining radiance of the Sun of righteousness. The grand truth, however, which pervades the whole Sermon, from its commencement to its close, a truth suited not to one but to every age of the Church, is that "Christ is the end," or consummation, or fulfilment "of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

It is interesting to observe the peculiar effect of this sermon upon the hearers of Christ. The Evangelist notes it thus :—

Vv. 28. and 29. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine : for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."

It seems evident from these words, that though portions of the Sermon were afterwards repeated on separate occasions by Christ, yet the whole was delivered on the mount in the commencement of His ministry. He thus publicly introduced the kingdom of God, or the gospel dispensation, connecting it in the closest manner with the Jewish economy, which was familiar to the people. Many of the Jews had

been waiting like Simeon and Anna for the consolation of Israel. The voice of ancient prophecy had been silent for nearly four hundred years. And when the Redeemer came proclaiming the holiness and spirituality of the law of God, denouncing the perversions of the Scribes and Pharisees, and urging upon His hearers to enter into the privileges of the kingdom of grace, and to seek the full enjoyment of the kingdom of glory hereafter, the people listened with mute astonishment. "Never man spake like this man" was the silent expression of their hearts. In the hands of the Scribes the law had been perverted to suit the tastes and wicked inclinations of men. But Jesus "spoke as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." Calm, dignified, uncompromising, he faithfully proclaimed the truth of God, regardless of the smiles and the frowns of men. It was a novel sight in Judea to behold such a teacher as this,—one whose whole instructions, and manner, and deportment, bespoke a higher origin than that of earth. The people wondered. It does not appear that the teaching of Christ on this occasion was followed by any other immediate effect than that of astonishment. Whether any of His hearers believed we are not informed. Their responsibility, however, after listening to such a discourse from the mouth of the Holy One of God, was fearfully increased. We also have been privileged to hear Him who hath

spoken to us from heaven. Let us fear, then, lest we be hearers of the word and not doers also, thus building our house upon the sand, and laying up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

THE END.

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