

Matthias Loy

The Sermon on the Mount *A Practical Study of Matthew 5-7*



The Sermon on the Mount

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The Sermon on the Mount

A Practical Study of Matthew Chapters 5-7

By Prof. Matthias Loy, D.D.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]

Please have patience with us when you come across typos. Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

1. Introduction.

IN THE FIRST YEAR of His public ministry Jesus returned to Galilee from a sorrowful journey to Jerusalem. Leaving Nazareth, which had been His home, “He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast.” After a day of toil, “He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer.” In the morning He called His disciples about Him, and selected twelve to be His constant companions and ministers, who formed “the glorious company of Apostles.” The place was probably the elevation known as the Horns of Hattin, not far distant from Capernaum, on the Galilean lake.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all manner of sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He’ healed them. And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him; and He opened His mouth and taught them.”

With these words St. Matthew introduces the greatest sermon which was ever preached on earth, and which, from the place where it was delivered, is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount.

The scope of this magnificent oration, notwithstanding the multiplicity of the topics discussed, is not difficult to apprehend. The people were not

yet prepared for a complete presentation of the Gospel with its glorious plan of salvation through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and for this we must not look in the sermon, although it is the longest of our Lord's recorded discourses. No direct mention is made of the redemption through His obedience unto death, and of its application by the Holy Spirit, and of its appropriation by faith. It expounds and applies the law, under whose tuition and discipline God had since the time of Moses been preparing the children of Israel for the advent of the Savior, who was promised with ever increasing clearness since the entrance of sin into the world through Adam's fall. The scope of the sermon is therefore misapprehended when it is presumed to be the setting forth of the essentials of Christianity, that should serve as a compend of the religion which Christ introduced and established on earth for the salvation of fallen man. According to the Scriptures salvation is not by the Law, however fully and forcibly it may be presented, but by the grace of God in Christ, as it is revealed in the Gospel. "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:17. How great the error is of assuming that souls condemned because of sin are saved by obeying the divine commandments is shown by St. Paul's words:

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law." Gal. 5:4.

That which condemns us as sinners cannot be that which justifies us as sinless. The Law makes known to us our sin, which is the transgression of the Law; and it is powerless to save not only when it is misunderstood by the carnal mind, but also when it is made plain to us in its spiritual import by our Lord's exposition of its deeper significance. Indeed, the curse which it pronounces upon man's transgression becomes all the more effective and emphatic when we learn that it requires not only holy words and works, but holy hearts. The sermon on the mount gives us the much needed light on the spiritual meaning of the Law and the depth of our sinful depravity in our inward rebellion against its holiness, but contains not the slightest intimation that it would, under any view of its import or any attitude assumed towards it, deliver us from the condemnation which it pronounces upon our sinful race.

On the other hand it is an unwarranted restriction when the attempt is made to exclude the Gospel entirely from our minds in studying the sermon. The admission that it treats mainly of the Law by no means implies such a restriction of its meaning. Nothing is more needful for a correct understanding of the Scriptures than a proper distinction between Law and Gospel. We can understand neither in its pure import and purpose when we confound the one with the other. To tell people what God requires of us in the ten commandments, and then teach them that their only hope of eternal life must rest on their fulfillment of these requirements, leads to despair. It may be a correct statement of the demands which the Creator justly makes upon His intelligent creatures, but it is a false presentation of the way of salvation revealed in Holy Scripture. Even when the Law of the Lord is studied, we need the Gospel in order to understand the Lord's will and to walk in the way by which He would lead us to the blessedness of eternal life.

That the sermon on the mount is an exposition of the Law which was given by Moses is plain to every attentive reader's view; but it should be just as plain to every Christian reader that the exposition was not designed to ignore and set aside the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, but must stand in intimate relation to it in the divine economy. The purpose of the sermon manifestly is to show the righteousness which God's Law requires and which must prevail in His kingdom. It does not abrogate or mitigate the divine commands or furnish a new code to supplant the old; but it removes the rubbish under which the Jews had buried its meaning, and sets in a clear light the holiness which it requires. The righteous Law is thus restored to its original purity and majesty, and rescued from the deprivation into which false teachers had brought it by their human ordinances and traditions, and thus reduced it to a level with the carnal impulses and dictates of man in his fallen estate. Our Savior, by doing this needful work, does not become a new Lawgiver, as if Moses' work had become obsolete, but He does render the old Law, which is holy and good, effectual to accomplish its end in the divine plan of salvation.

Our study of the sermon must, therefore, embrace all the implications of its words as these are known to us from other portions of Scripture, all of which He came to fulfill. His advent into the world had not the design, to enforce the Law and its penalties upon its sinful people.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17.

To this the Law is meant to be tributary. It does not save us, but it can show us God’s righteousness and our sin, and thus be serviceable in leading us to the Savior.

“For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Rom. 10:4.

In the light of the Gospel, therefore, we propose to study the Sermon on the Mount, not overlooking the fact that it is our Lord’s exposition of the Law, but always keeping in mind that the Law was always and is now, not an independent way of salvation, but “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:24-26.

It must not be inferred from the words of St. Paul, “we are no longer under a schoolmaster,” that the law has lost its divine authority and is now without a vocation and a purpose in the divine economy. That would indicate a reckless reading of the apostle’s statement. If the inference were true, the sermon on the mount would be of little moment to us Christians, who are saved by grace and rejoice in the hope of glory through faith in a crucified and risen Savior. But it is not true, and the sermon does concern us and all men as a revelation of God’s holy will, that binds us all and holds us all to a strict account, as the law by which the whole earth shall be finally judged.

Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are indeed no longer under the schoolmaster who was appointed to lead them to the Savior. When that is accomplished in them they have become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and are justified by that faith, because Christ is “made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” 1 Cor. 1:30. They have no cause to tremble at the fulminations of God’s wrath upon every soul of man that doeth evil, because they have found refuge in One who is mighty to save and whose robe of righteousness covers all their

sins, so that for the sake of His merits, acquired by His vicarious obedience unto death for all men, they stand acquitted now and shall stand acquitted on the judgment day.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28.

They are not under the curse of the law which is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, neither are they under the constraints which are laid upon men by its threatenings of indignation and wrath upon those who transgress its holy commandments. In that respect they are free from the law. They are not required to fulfill it in order to be saved from its condemnation; for Christ has fulfilled it for them, that they might be saved through Him. They are not driven to obey its righteous requirements by fearful menaces of eternal perdition; for Christ has given them hearts that love righteousness and delight to do His holy will.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

The schoolmaster has done his work when he has brought us to see our sinfulness and helplessness and to realize our wretchedness under the fearful penalties which the law denounces upon the sinner, and when he has thus prepared the way for the Gospel with its gracious announcement of pardon and peace to all who repent and believe. And for this the law, and the sermon on the mount which expounds its spiritual meaning, is still necessary. For all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and none can escape the condemnation declared against sinners except by coming to the Savior, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. But to this end a knowledge of our sin is indispensable; for no one will come to the Savior who denies his need of salvation and no one will accept His help who proudly denies that he has any need of help. The way into the kingdom of God is the way of repentance. There never was and never can be any

other way to the salvation prepared for us in Christ than that of recognizing our lost estate in sin, that we may flee for refuge to the hope set before us in Christ. Therefore men everywhere need the law now as they did when our Lord preached the sermon on the mount.

And we Christians need it still, though its office of schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ is accomplished in all them that believe and are thus no longer under the schoolmaster. But our relation to it is changed. It is to us a revelation of God's will in His holiness, as it is to all men. This will is unchangeable, as God Himself is unchangeable. Its authority is universal and eternal, because it is divine. But believers are not under it as man is in his natural condition of slavery to sin. He is free from its condemnation, because Christ, who is mighty to save, assumed our nature and our sin, and accepted its condemnation in our stead. For God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 1 Cor. 5:21.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Gal. 3:15.

The way of salvation is plain.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

He came into this world of sin and death not to condemn fallen mankind, and not to teach us how to save ourselves from the curse which the violated law pronounces upon us, but to save us. No teaching could enable us to do what sin has made impossible. We cannot fulfill the holy law of God, and we cannot by any power in our disabled nature escape the penalty of transgression. The wages of sin is death. Only God can save us, and He sent His Son to effect our salvation.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John 3:17-18.

Salvation is by faith in the Savior.

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-12.

It is plain therefore that salvation cannot be by the law. That would mean that we need no Savior, implying either that we have no sin on account of which the law could condemn and pronounce its sentence of eternal death upon us, or that, if we have transgressed or in any way come short of the law's requirements, we are able to make good our failure and satisfy all just demands that righteousness may make upon us. Lamentable as it is, not only are there millions who sit in the darkness which Satan has brought into the world and persist in denying their sinfulness and asserting their own righteousness, but there are also other millions who profess to be Christians and still nurse the flattering delusion, that they are good enough to have a just claim upon the mansions in our Father's house, and a cheering hope that the God of love will not banish them from His presence for any little faults, which are common to men, that may still appear as defects in their righteousness. Thus the Savior stands at the door of multitudes and knocks in vain for entrance into their hearts, because they feel no need of any closer communion with Him or of any saving grace that He might impart. People who have the Bible and access to the preaching of the Gospel have no excuse for such a treatment of the Savior, who died for their offenses and rose

again for their justification. They have the opportunity to know better. The natural man, in his ignorance of spiritual things and in his blindness under the disabling power of sin, may deem his course reasonable when he prates of his own goodness and glorious deeds which even transcend the requirements of the law, but the regenerated soul, confessing faith in Christ, must blush and tremble at such a treatment of the Savior; for He comes to deliver us from the satanic dream of self-righteousness, which has no room for salvation by grace and tramples under foot the purchase of His blood, and to extend His pitying and powerful arms to snatch us as brands from the burning and bring us, notwithstanding all our sin and unworthiness, to His glorious abode of bliss in heaven. The hope of righteousness and salvation by our own fulfillment of the law is suggested and encouraged by the enemy of our souls to keep us away from Christ, who alone can save us. Of this faithful Christians who believe the Word of God are sure. For the Holy Spirit explicitly declares, not only that there is no other name than that of Jesus given whereby we can be saved, but also that the law, in which so many trust, is not available for the sinner's justification, and that trusting in it can only lead to destruction.

“For if there had been a law given that could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith might be given to all them that believe.” Gal. 3:21, 22.

The law could only demand that we should be holy, and thus pleasing to God, but it could not and cannot make us holy and remove God's displeasure when we have transgressed its holy requirements. Only God, against whom we have sinned, can deliver us from the curse which sin has brought upon us,

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:3, 4.

Therefore it is emphatically declared that those who rely upon the works of the law to establish a righteousness which will entitle them to admission into the kingdom of glory, are deceiving themselves and compassing their own ruin, because while they thus trust in that which cannot save they are rejecting the only Savior of men.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” Gal. 5:4, 5.

The law serves a good purpose still, and Christ expounded it that it might accomplish its end; but that purpose is not the sinner’s justification by the works of the law, which is impossible. On the contrary, it is, aside from restraining bad men from nefarious deeds by the terrors of threatened damnation, the exposure of sin in the sinner’s consciousness, that he may give heed to the remedy that is offered him in the Gospel.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Rom. 10:4.

The sermon on the mount was preached in the interest of the great salvation which came by the grace and truth which were revealed through Christ, and its preaching of the law as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Him for salvation is always needed in our world of sin.

But more than this concerns us in our Lord’s exposition of the Law. It is meant for all Christians of all time, and when men err in its application, the error does not lie in assuming the sermon to be authoritative as a divine guide to right life in Christ’s kingdom. That is not a mistake. The will of God always was man’s righteousness and never could be otherwise. Be ye holy, for the Lord your God is holy. That has ever been the law of God’s government. And that is the law which our Savior explains and enforces in this sermon. The error of the legalists lies in their attempt to substitute that law for the Gospel, and thus to make Christ a minister of Moses instead of accepting Him as the Savior of the world. The effect of such error is to keep

people under the bondage of the law, and to deprive them of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, and of the peace and joy which come by faith in Him as their Redeemer from sin and death,

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.” Rom. 3:19-25.

It is a grave offense against the majesty and mercy of our Savior, and a fatal subversion of the grace and truth which He brought to men, to represent the sermon on the mount as expounding the law with a view to securing the salvation of sinners by their obedience to its holy commandments. The law declares all men guilty and pronounces condemnation on them; by the law is the knowledge of sin. Not a word is spoken in the sermon that would be fairly subject even to the suspicion that it teaches justification by the deeds of the law. By these no flesh can be justified. Christ came to save us from the sin and death which the law makes known to us, and which thus becomes our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we may find salvation in Him. He “is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” and for this purpose He expounds the law.

But when this purpose has been accomplished and souls have been brought to repentance and faith in Him unto the forgiveness of their sins and salvation through His grace, and when the law has done its work as the schoolmaster and these believing souls are free from its bondage and its condemnation, it still has an office to perform with regard to them, and the sermon on the mount effectually performs it. The law does not regenerate

the sinner and fit him for the kingdom of righteousness and glory, but it does show believers how they ought to live and please God when they have been thus fitted by His grace.

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Rom. 3:31.

For our Savior fulfills it in our stead by His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, and gives us grace that we may delight to do His will and freely walk in the path of His precepts.

The disciples of Christ are therefore exhorted to walk worthy of their vocation in that holiness which grace has made possible to them when their hearts have been purified by faith,

“Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died. He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.” Rom. 6:9-15,

The believer, who by the faith which the Holy Spirit has wrought in Him through the Gospel has escaped the curse of the law, is now empowered by the grace of God to love the way of holiness and bear fruit to His glory.

The law is to him still a guide on that way, because it is the revelation of his Maker's holy will, for whose service he was created and redeemed and renewed. It is not made more rigorous by our Lord's teaching, for it was perfect from the beginning; but neither was it softened and lowered in its re-

quirements by His mercy, because the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. Those who look upon the new covenant as a modified legal system of righteousness, by which the demands made upon man are diminished and the way of salvation is made broader, have yet to learn the first elements of Christianity, which knows no salvation by the deeds of the law. But still Christians need it, though they are not under its constraints and its curse, but under grace. The Holy Spirit who is given them sanctifies and leads them in the way of the divine commandments, which is the way of holiness. Freedom from the law therefore does not mean license to live after the lust of the flesh, but liberty from the bondage of sin, that we might freely serve the living God.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” 2 Cor. 5:14-15.

When under the law they have learned their sinfulness and their condemnation and their helplessness, and despairing of salvation by any righteousness which their efforts could secure under its terms, they have come to Jesus and accepted His pardon and peace through faith in His name, they are blessed with the good will to serve the Lord that bought them, and bear fruits of holiness to His praise forever.

That Christians, who are thus inwardly disposed to live righteously and who are led by the Holy Spirit in the paths of righteousness, should still be exhorted to do what they are disposed to do with their might, seems an inconsistency. But it can seem so only to those who have little knowledge of the Christian life. St. Paul explains the difficulty when he writes:

“We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.”

“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.”

“I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” Rom. 7:15-23.

This warfare between the spirit and the flesh is a matter of common Christian experience, and it imposes upon us a struggle against the sin that is in us which continues during our earthly life. Satan, by craft and cunning, by menaces and enticements, makes use of the trying situation to compass the believers' fall from grace, and they are in daily danger, because of the infirmity of the flesh, of growing weary in well-doing and yielding to the allurements of sin. They must watch and pray that they enter not into temptation, and earnest warnings are given of the peril that besets them if they become careless in using the means of grace and turn to the beggarly elements of the world.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8:13-14.

In the light of these truths, which will serve for our guidance at many a point, we propose to enter upon a practical study of the great sermon on the mount, hoping that the occupation with its heavenly lessons will, by the blessing of our ever present Lord and Savior, be profitable for the reader's instruction in righteousness and his establishment in grace. We shall divide the sermon into sections for greater convenience in considering its comforts and setting forth its various topics. These divisions are mostly indicated by the different subjects presented, although in a few instances, especially in the seventh chapter, the verses have no obvious connection as parts of a

larger theme. In all cases it shall be our endeavor to ascertain and set forth the truth which our Lord's words were designed to convey.

2. The Beatitudes. Matthew 5:1-12

NOTHING COULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE than that the great sermon preached by Him who came into the world, that the world through Him might be saved, should begin with beatitudes, or blessings, which are all dependent upon His life and death of obedience for our salvation. He announces the Gospel of grace by setting forth results which are attained in His kingdom, although He does not now enter upon any explicit statement of His gracious work of redemption and its appropriation by faith, through which these results are accomplished. That they may be attained He directs attention to necessary qualifications for citizenship in His kingdom, that the law may do its preparatory work in the hearts of His hearers, and get the ground ready for the seed of the Gospel, which brings salvation to the lost and life to the dead in sin. The blessings are not pronounced upon all men who hear the gracious announcement, but only on those whose condition is designated and who are thus qualified for the benediction.

I. “Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit; For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of God.”

The kingdom of God with all its grace and glory is promised to all who labor and are heavy laden and come to Him, whose words are spirit and life, that they may find rest for their souls.

1. Not Material Poverty

The whole situation makes it evident that it is not poverty in regard to the goods of this world that the Savior has in view. Lack of material wealth is

not a qualification for the kingdom which is not of this world. The Scriptures do indeed frequently speak of the poor and the rich in terms suggestive, in the economy of divine providence, of an advantage possessed by the former over the latter. It would seem as if those who must bear the burden and inconvenience of poverty were to have some compensation in receiving a larger measure of opportunity for spiritual gifts, while those who have received, their good things in this life receive their evil things in the life to come. God cares for the poor and commands His children to consider them and supply their needs. On the other hand riches are represented as a danger against whose seductive wiles we must be ever on our guard. But neither earthly poverty nor wealth, which are external and temporal in their nature, can fit or unfit a person for the kingdom of God, which is spiritual and is not of this world. A poor man is not a child of God and an heir of heaven because he is poor, neither can he become such by renouncing all worldly possessions and choosing poverty; a rich man is not debarred from the hope of glory because he is rich, neither can he purchase a place in the mansions of our Father's house by the employment of all his wealth. Adoption into the household of God depends on other conditions than those of temporal possessions.

There is another kind of poverty than that of lack of money and earthly goods. It is internal and spiritual. A man may feel poor, though he have all the wealth that earth can afford, and this in two respects. His feeling may be of the delusive sort in which it fails to correspond with the fact, as when one possessed of wealth thinks himself too poor to spend any part of it in deeds of charity and is tormented with visions of coming want. It is not such internal poverty, which recognizes no gifts of God and is unthankful, which has no trust in God and views the future with dread, which is based on the false imaginings of an evil heart, that our Savior contemplates when He pronounces a blessing upon the poor in spirit. But there is another kind of feeling in which a poverty is experienced which arises from no illusion and which accords with existing reality as the Scriptures reveal it and the human heart may be brought to realize it. It is spiritual poverty. A person may be very rich and yet have the consciousness, not only of having nothing that he could properly call his own and being entirely dependent on God for his daily bread, but of being in total want of those moral and spiritual qualities without which, notwithstanding all his wealth, one is poor indeed. That is the poverty which our Lord has in view, and into which He would

lead His hearers, that they might inherit His blessing. The soul by nature is very poor in spiritual things. It has nothing that could give it standing in the realm of the spiritual, that could satisfy its spiritual needs, that could render it acceptable to its Maker. And it can do nothing to acquire such spiritual treasure. It is poor and helpless, and when one has come to realize this poverty he is poor in spirit. That is a condition of truthfulness in regard to one's own soul into which no power of nature can lead us, and which remains the same whether we be rich or poor in this world's goods. To enter the kingdom of God and become heirs of its blessings something more is needed than that which this world can give or the natural mind, which is of this world, can acquire with all its efforts. To secure these heavenly treasures and make us heirs of our Heavenly Father's wealth, was the purpose of Christ's coming into this world of sin.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name.” John 1:12.

The poor in spirit are those who, whether rich or poor in temporal things, are conscious of their poverty in regard to that righteousness and true holiness with which man was endowed when God created him in His own image and which is required of him to fulfill his mission. This image was lost by the fall, when, “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12. In consequence of this “the whole world lieth in wickedness.” 1 John 5:19. But God has not changed, and still requires of man the righteousness in which he was created.

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” 1 Thess. 4:3.

Nothing could alter the purpose of the Creator with regard to His creature, and notwithstanding the coming of sin into the world and the resulting universal depravity, the divine demand remains the same that it was from the beginning.

“Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Lev. 19:2.

The whole human race is thus in disharmony with its God and His government of the universe, and its condition is therefore one of utter wretchedness, because of its failure to fulfill its destiny and to attain the end of its creation. Not all realize this their forlorn condition, and few understand the cause and nature of their misery when they become conscious that their souls are not at rest. In spite of all the evil within them and around them, some even flatter themselves that all is well. But the fact remains the same, that man lacks what he most needs, and there is no health and no strength in him to supply the want.

“Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.” Rev. 3:16-18.

The same “deceivableness of unrighteousness” leads others to despair of any deliverance from the darkness and death of sin, as there certainly is none in view to the natural man, and many a poor mortal is thus driven to madness or seeks relief in suicide. All are in this miserable state of poverty and helplessness, whatever may be the delusions by which they seek to cloak it or escape its misery:

“...as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Rom. 3:10-12.

“The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Gal. 3:22.

To save from the sin and death which have wrought such ruin in the world was the purpose of Christ’s mission.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16, 17.

To this end all His teaching and preaching as well as all His suffering and death were directed. Therefore He called upon all who were willing to hear:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matt. 11:28.

In Him alone is help. There is no other name given under heaven by which a soul could be saved. “I am the vine,” He tells His disciples, “ye are the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5. The Eternal Son of God was made flesh and dwelt among us that He might be the mighty Savior of our lost world.

“The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.” Isa. 52:10.

He who preached this sermon on the mount lived and labored and suffered and died to save His people from their sins. And the poor in spirit are those

who have been brought to a realization of the situation, and who feel their need of a Savior, and the great salvation which he offers in His kingdom. They are conscious of their spiritual poverty. They are poor in all that would render them eternally happy. They can do nothing to retrieve the loss of their spiritual wealth and are powerless to acquire the moral riches which the Lord seeks in a creature so highly endowed, but so deeply fallen. Directed by the light which has shone into their souls they recognize the facts as they are. The grace of God has humbled their haughty spirit and rendered it lowly. They are penitent souls who have hearkened to the word of the Lord, the entrance of which giveth light. Man thus comes to know himself as the miserable sinner that he really is.

“If we say, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:8, 9.

The first thing necessary for deliverance from the wretchedness in which the world lies is to recognize the sin which has brought it upon us and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to rescue us from it.

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Ps. 34:18.

Accordingly the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, “came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying,” Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matt. 3:1, 2.

2. The Blessing Promised

The blessing promised to those who are thus poor in spirit is participation in the kingdom of heaven. This term is apparently used in a variety of significations, which has given rise to the fancy that it has no fixed and definite meaning. But the same thing is viewed in different circumstances and rela-

tions, and the fundamental meaning of the term designating it, remains the same, notwithstanding the modification which it undergoes in its application to various conditions. The kingdom of heaven is always the domain of grace in which our Savior reigns and dispenses the blessings which He has secured for men by His life and death on earth. We speak of it as coming when Christ comes with His Word, by which He exercises His dominion; we speak of it as present now, when Christ has gathered disciples around Him who believe in Him as their Savior; we speak of it as future when we look to the consummation of His gracious purpose in the glories of heaven. His kingdom is the Church on earth, the congregation of believers in which He reigns with absolute supremacy over such a people whom by His grace He has made His willing and loving subjects; and it is the same Church when it is rendered triumphant over sin and death and has entered into the everlasting inheritance of the saints in light, and when the redeemed shall behold Him in His glory and adore Him forevermore.

The Son of God, who became man that He might be our Savior by His vicarious obedience unto death, is Lord of all — the King of kings and Lord of lords, “God over all, blessed forever.” He rules over all creatures, and unbelievers as well as those who receive Him by faith and are made children of God and heirs of heaven, are subject to His authority and His power. Those who will not own Him as their merciful Redeemer must in the end own Him as their righteous Judge. To Him all power is given in heaven and on earth. In the most comprehensive sense Christ is King over all, and therefore the Church speaks of His kingdom of power as well as of grace and of glory, and thus of a threefold kingdom of our Lord. There is a propriety in this because He is Lord over all, and Christians are glad to honor Him as the Lord of all. But usually, when we speak of His kingdom we think of the great salvation which He has effected for all people and of the miracles of His grace by which a company has been gathered who accept the salvation offered by His Gospel, and who thus form a congregation of saints that recognize Him as their glorious King and willingly submit themselves to His gracious guidance. It is in this sense also that the words are to be understood in the text under consideration.

The poor in spirit are not only under the dominion of God, as all other creatures are, but theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In this are dispensed all the blessings of salvation which the King of Saints has acquired and imparts to them that believe and live under Him. They are the elect in Christ Jesus,

“who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,” 1 Cor. 1:30. Of such it is written,

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy,” 1 Pet. 2:9, 10.

This holy nation is the purchase of Christ’s blood, made His own peculiar people by the faith which His Spirit has wrought in their hearts, and who are cheerfully subject to Him in the kingdom of His grace. Of Him God said in the olden time:

“I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for’ Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Ps. 2:6-8.

This is He who was indicated when the prophet said: “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh,” Matt. 21:5. This is He of whom the angel spake in the annunciation to Mary:

“Behold, thou shalt conceive and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end,” Luke 1:31-33.

Therefore our Lord testified, when Pilate asked Him whether He is the King of the Jews:

“My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a King then? Jesus answered. Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice,” John 18:36:37.

This kingdom of truth and grace our Savior established by His Word and work, and all who hear His voice declaring pardon and peace, and who in their spiritual poverty flee for refuge to Him, are members of His kingdom and rejoice in His gracious presence and heavenly gifts. It is the kingdom of heaven in which He reigns over His redeemed and regenerated people here on earth and in heaven forever. Therefore Christians daily pray, “Thy kingdom come,” and the petition is granted “when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.”

The poor in spirit are blessed in their possession of that kingdom. For the realization of the promise the distinction between that kingdom in time and in eternity is of no essential moment. It exists now, and it shall exist forever; it is ours now, and it shall be ours forever. The King shall visibly come again and shall then, when all the earth shall be summoned to the final judgment, manifest His royalty and the glory of His kingdom as it would not appear under the depressing conditions of the world lying in its wickedness. But the kingdom of heaven is present on earth and its promised blessings are enjoyed now by all who believe.

“The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it,” Luke 16:16.

But as it is an everlasting kingdom and the fulness of its blessedness is experienced only in eternity, it is often spoken of as future. On the judgment day “the King shall say unto them on His right hand. Come, ye blessed of

my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” Matt. 25:34. The distinction in regard to time marks an obvious difference in the Christian’s fruition of the blessedness of Christ’s kingdom, without involving any difference in its nature. The same kingdom that shall be ours forever is ours now. So eternal life is ours by faith here on earth. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,” John 3:36. But that everlasting life embraces much that is not completely realized during our pilgrimage as strangers in a strange land, and is therefore a promise for the future and an object of Christian hope. In the final decision the ungodly “shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,” Matt. 25:46. The believer is in the kingdom of God now, is guided and comforted by the enduring presence of the great King during his sojourn on earth, and rejoices in the hope of glory.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory,” Col. 3:1-4.

The kingdom is yours forever.

II. “Blessed Are They That Mourn, For They Shall Be Comforted.”

There is mourning on earth still, notwithstanding the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, but entrance into this implies all the conditions of comfort. The key to this second beatitude is contained in the Saviour’s words:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Matt. 11:28.

1. Many Causes of Mourning

There are many causes of mourning in this earthly life.

“Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,” Job 5:6-7.

If the believer entered at once into the full enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven in all its blessedness when he comes to Christ, His disciples would be exempt from the sorrows and sufferings which are the common lot in this valley of the shadow of death. But the separation into a company of the blest in the realms of light and the host of the wretched in the outer darkness of hell, takes place only when the purpose of God in regard to this world is accomplished and the final destiny has been reached in the last judgment. Until then the penitent sinners who have become saints in Christ and the impenitent sinners who reject the Saviour and continue in their sin, live together in this world that lieth in wickedness, and suffer together the disorder and distress which sin inflicts upon the individual and the community. The wages of sin is death, and all the pains and penalties which lead to death are its natural consequence, from which nature knows no way of escape.

In all the ages man's mind has wrestled with the dark problem of evil and has found no abiding comfort, frequently as dreamers have flattered themselves that they have found the remedy for all human ills. But sickness and suffering, misfortunes and failures, calamities and disasters continued to come as before, and many a reputed wise man has concluded that there is no consolation except that death ends all. But that, too, fails to satisfy; for while death does end the misery of the present state, it furnishes no assurance that the present state is the end of all, and that the soul will not continue to think and feel and suffer after death has effected the rupture between it and the body in which it dwells. On the contrary, death is the outcome of all the disorder and disintegration which sin has brought. “The sting of death is sin,” 1 Cor. 16:56. And while men talk glibly of escaping the miseries of life by rushing into the arms of death, in the secret recesses

of men's souls the tormenting question arises, What then? Sin brings trouble, and the troubled soul has no resources within itself from which it could derive rest by reflecting on the vicissitudes of life and the prospect of death.

It is not the plan of God to effect a restoration of Paradise with its beauty and its bliss in the present world, and Christians are not taught to look for a life of exemption from pain and sorrow while they sojourn here. They too are subject to sickness and death, and to the calamities with which nature, under the disturbing influence of sin and death, threaten us, and to the moral disorders and miseries which sin has introduced into our social life. Their happy goal is reached only when their trials are ended with their earthly life and they, having been faithful unto death, enter into the joys of their Lord. "Let not your heart be troubled," the Savior tells His disciples; "ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also," John 14:1-3.

While all are subject to the evils which sin has brought into the world, it is thus manifest that, in their relation to those evils and their consequences, there is a great difference between those who are in the kingdom of God and those who are yet under Satan's power in the kingdom of darkness. The ways of sin lead to suffering, the ways of holiness lead to happiness. But this is far from setting the whole subject of man's relation to the evils, physical and moral, which darken his faith and burden his heart, in a clear light, and is by no means an adequate elucidation of the difference in this respect between the Christian and the unbeliever. Many suffer pain and distress as the natural consequence of their sin; but it would be a violation of the truth declared in Scripture, and a denial of the facts of experience, to maintain that each man's pain and distress is the result of his own individual transgressions. When one indulges in the lusts of the flesh until he has wrecked his mind and body, he evidently suffers the consequence of his own sins; but when another is bruised by a ruffian or defrauded of his property, it is another's sin, not his own, that has caused the suffering. They were miserable comforters who imputed to Job the authorship of all his troubles, and urged him to adore the justice of God in rewarding him according to his wicked works. The argument is always false that a person's moral quality may be measured by the suffering which he endures. We do injustice to ourselves and violate charity to others when we apply such a test. All evil,

physical as well as moral, is a result of sin, which works out its wages of death through manifold aches and pains and disasters. But it is not true that each individual in this life bears the share proportioned to his sins. This God has reserved for the day of final reckoning, when all accounts are settled forever by His righteous judgment. Meantime He employs all things, including men and their deeds, by His providence to work out His eternal plan, and accordingly makes all things, including the evils which sin has brought into the world, work together for good to them that love Him.

It thus comes to pass that the wicked, whom the goodness of God would lead to repentance, seem to prosper in this world, while the children of God, whom He chastens as a loving Father for their everlasting good, are weighed down with adversity. To man's limited vision the Lord's ways thus often appear unequal, although they are always wise and good.

“Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like grass and wither as the green herb.” Ps. 57:1-2,

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

“Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.” Ps. 73:1-3.

The psalmist then refers to his own troubles as compared with the ungodly, whose eyes stand out with fatness, and proceeds:

“When I thought to know this it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God: then understood I their end. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castest them down into destruction.” Ps. 73:16-18.

God has not revealed to us the secrets of His government and furnished us with the details by which His providence is working out His wise and beneficent plans, and we gravely err when we think that we know it all and form our judgments from appearances, without being able to see the bearing of all upon the final outcome in eternity. Here, as in all the dealings of God in which it is not His pleasure to make His counsels known, we can only reverently exclaim:

“Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” Rom. 11:33.

2. The Mourners Shall Be Comforted

They that mourn are blessed, for they shall be comforted. The comfort is that which the Savior promises and bestows, and must therefore apply to a mourning that stands in connection with His will and the purpose of His coming. We get at the root of the promised blessing only when we see it in its connection with sin and salvation.

We have no warrant in the Word of God for applying the promise of comfort to those who are grieving over the natural consequences of their own transgressions, desiring to be relieved of the suffering without abandoning its cause. Many are not only tortured with bodily pains as a result of their sinful indulgences, but even fail to perceive that their suffering has any connection with sin and are not conscious of their guilt; and many, when they cannot close their eyes to the obvious fact that their misery is the effect of deeds which the law of God has forbidden, mourn because of the suffering, not because of the sin. The consolations of the Gospel are not available in such conditions; for in these the mourning soul is more likely to curse God and die than to accept a divine blessing conveyed through tribulation. Nor can suffering as such, though it come without any direct fault of the sufferer, nor the mourning which it causes, be inherently a power to work blessing. The loss of temporal goods, the ravages of disease, and notably the death of relatives and dear friends are fruitful sources of mourning, and to the humble disciple of Christ may be potent ministers of blessing; but ex-

perience shows how frequently they merely furnish occasions for murmuring and complaining against divine Providence, if thoughts of God are admitted at all; and how often mourning, in souls that decline to recognize its ministry in God's government of the world, is an occasion for multiplying evils instead of deriving blessings through the comfort of the Holy Ghost. The primary condition of inheriting the blessing which Christ pronounces upon those who mourn is to mourn for sin and flee to Him for refuge from its misery. Then there is consolation for every ill that may befall us in our pilgrimage to the Heavenly City where ills are known no more.

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” 1 Tim. 4:8.

The mourners whom our Lord has in view are manifestly those who mourn after a godly sort. They are the hearers of God's Word who feel the burden of their sin and seek deliverance from its condemnation in the Savior, who invites them to come to Him that they may find rest unto their souls. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” says the prophet,

“...because the Lord hath appointed 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.”
Isa. 61:1-3.

That is the kind of mourning contemplated in this beatitude, to which the promise of comfort was given in the olden times. That promise was fulfilled in the King of Zion who has come to redeem His people. St. Paul explains the nature of this mourning when he tells us that “godly sorrow worketh re-

pentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” 2 Cor. 7:10.

Those who thus mourn shall be comforted. There is a balm for every wound, but it is found only in the kingdom of heaven, where the great Physician reigns and exerts His healing power, and which only they can enter who repent and believe the Gospel. All the ills of life, which fill the earth with incessant mourning, are the result of sin, which has brought disorder and death into the world; and from this sin and its fatal consequence the Son of God came to save us. But the salvation is only in Him, and the comfort which He promises is the comfort which He provides and He alone can give. The woe and wailing did not cease on earth when the Savior came, and has not ceased since the proclamation of salvation is made in all the earth; for the greatest portion of our race still sit in darkness and in sin, and the kingdom of heaven, into which the saved have been gathered, has not yet passed into that glory which shall be revealed when its earthly mission shall be completed. The full realization of its blessedness still lies in the future and is the object of the Christian’s hope. But the penitent believer lays hold of the promise, and has the patience of hope while he pursues his journey in the company of his gracious and mighty Lord through tribulations into the happy land that lies beyond the wilderness of this world. He has the great comfort of salvation in Christ, and in this he is comforted in all the suffering that he must endure by the way which leads to its complete fruition.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.” Isa. 40:1-2.

With this comfort in our hearts we can rejoice in the Lord notwithstanding the pain that may still be our portion before our goal is reached.

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” 2 Cor. 1:3-4.

III. “Blessed Are The Meek, For They Shall Inherit The Earth.”

The promise is to the penitent souls that they shall overcome the world and all shall be theirs.

1. Lowly Not Conceited

The word meek signifies lowly and humble, the opposite of self-conceited and haughty. When one thinks modestly of himself, suffers wrongs without resentment, and claims no merit and no honors for himself, we call him meek. He is gentle and forbearing, and thus forms a striking contrast to the proud and self-asserting person who is insulted at any suggestion of faults and feels hurt when others are honored above him. The character is illustrated in the publican who, when he went up into the temple to pray, “standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner;” while the proud Pharisee, who illustrates the opposite quality, “stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” Luke 18:9-14. To obtain the bless-

ings of Christ's kingdom the Pharisaic self-conceit and pride of fancied virtues and achievements must be abandoned, and the sinner must be led to recognize his poverty and nakedness and helplessness. The poor in spirit and they that mourn their sin are blessed, not the self-conceited and the self-complacent. Our Lord in another place says:

“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Matt. 11:29.

And St. Paul teaches the same lesson when He says:

“Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Phil. 2:3-8.

The hope of humanity is in that cross through which Christ redeemed us, that as His redeemed people we might humbly follow in His footsteps and by faith live under Him forever in His kingdom.

The natural heart is not meek and lowly, and therefore is not in accord with the heavenly call to repentance and faith in him who died for us. Only the grace of Him who calls us and with the call furnishes the power to heed and obey it, can qualify us to receive His blessing.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.” James 1:21.

The proud heart, which always thinks of itself more highly than it ought to think, must be humbled before it can realize the blessedness of the Savior's promise. Hence the apostle writes:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Rom. 12:1, 2.

To inherit the blessings of Christ man must renounce his natural pride and fond conceit of himself. The grace of God, which confers all blessings upon men, first renders the soul meek, then multiplies blessings upon those who receive with meekness the engrafted Word. Under the power of that Word we become nothing in our own eyes, that we may become something to the praise of Him who hath given us a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. “To this man will I look,” saith the Lord, “even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my Word.” Isa. 66:2. Not those who flatter themselves that all is well with them and that they have no need of a Savior, are the blessed, but those who hearken to the heavenly call which offers help in Christ to the distressed.

“For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth and delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Ps. 37:10.11.

2. The Promise

The promise made to the meek is that they shall inherit the earth and be blessed in such inheritance. The promise to the poor in spirit is the kingdom of heaven; the promise to those that mourn is the consolation of Israel founded on the coming of that kingdom: is the blessing of this third beatitude something different?

At a mere cursory glance the words would seem to indicate that it is some temporal good, some treasure that belongs to this world, that is in store for the meek. That would not be wholly false, inasmuch as we know that godliness has the promise of this life and the life to come. But the interpretation would unquestionably be false which made earthly goods the only thing promised, or even the main thing.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” 1 Tim. 1:15.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17.

The provision made in Christ was for man’s salvation from sin and death, and does not contemplate as an end the bestowal of temporal blessings on some and of eternal blessings on others. Its purpose is the eternal salvation of all. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Rom. 6:23. Earthly gifts are bestowed by the same infinite love which moved God to send His Son into the world to save that which was lost; but their value lies in their relation to the kingdom of God, and is rightly estimated only when they are viewed as tributary to its eternal purpose. Otherwise all earthly possessions are fleeting shadows, and all hopes of finding in them the happiness which the soul craves are vanity.

“Labor not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes on that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away, as an eagle toward heaven.” Prov. 23:4, 5.

Earthly goods have their place in the economy of divine goodness and mercy as minor manifestations of the same love which is magnified in the mission of the Savior and the application by the Holy Spirit of His merits to men for their salvation through faith. In Christ we have all; without Him we

have nothing, though for a little while we have all the reputed riches and glory of the world.

“All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.” 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

Christians are the people who are truly rich, though they may be among those whom the world calls poor. Our Father in heaven is absolute owner of all that exists, and believers in Christ are the heirs of all His immense wealth.

“The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Rom. 8:16, 17.

These children can well be content that their Heavenly Father administers these treasures for their benefit according to His infinite wisdom and love, though they pursue their pilgrimage to their heavenly home “as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” Of these temporal goods God gives us for our present use what we need on our journey. Our daily bread is secured to us by His promise; how much of our inheritance it is well to commit to our hands in this life for administration in our stewardship, He knows best, and His children are happy that He wisely disposes all according to His good and gracious will. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” 1 Tim. 6:6.

It often looks, as man views it with his limited vision, as if the ungodly fared better in this world than those who, according to the divine promise, inherit the earth while they are heirs of heaven. Riches and honors and pleasures are the portion of many who live without God and without hope in the world, and many a Christian stumbles at what seems glaringly inconsistent with our Lord’s promise to the meek. But the word of promise is sure, and Christians who are thus offended give way to the weakness of the flesh instead of being strong in the Lord.

“For evil doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.” Ps. 37:9.

The Lord does not say that the wicked shall have no earthly goods. He deals bountifully even with those who reject Him, and gives rain and sunshine and harvest to them also. Knowing no other, they seek temporal treasures, and they do not always fail to find them. Sometimes their success, as the world counts success, is wonderful. God knows best how to bestow His gifts for the accomplishment of His purpose, which is always wise and good. But taking the entire life, with its little term of time and its endless reach of eternity, into account, the projects of the ungodly are always failures. Greed of gain is sometimes gratified, but the pearl is lost in the dirt that is gathered, while in the gracious providence of God the whole earth is made tributary to the salvation of the elect. Therefore Christians, who have learned to put their trust in God, not in their own wisdom and skill and strength, are admonished:

“Having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For 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. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” 1 Tim. 6:8-10.

They that inherit the earth are in their meekness heartily willing that their Father in heaven should manage the vast estate and apportion to each of His numerous children such a measure of the property as seems good in His sight and is most conducive to their eternal welfare. Those who want more, distrust God’s wisdom and love, and hence covetousness is declared to be idolatry. Col. 3:5. The meek who inherit the earth cannot forget that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.” Ps. 24:1.

There are some people who, looking merely on the surface of things, allege that this minimizes the blessing promised to the meek. They conclude that in this view the righteous have no advantage over the ungodly as regards the heritage in question, since all alike have the use of earthly things under the dispensations of God's providence. But this erring thought comes only from a lack of insight into the ways of God and the purpose and blessedness of His kingdom. In the mercy of the Maker of all, the ungodly, while He permits them to live in a land that is not theirs, but belongs to God and His children, are preserved and supplied with the necessaries of life, and thus apparently enjoy the same benefits as the meek and lowly who are said to inherit the earth. The rich man had his good things on earth, while Lazarus lay hungry at his door. But the rich man was not an heir of our Father's wealth and had no treasures laid up in heaven; he died, and lost everything, and was tormented. The world as it lieth in wickedness, with all its seeming prosperity and pleasure, lacks everything that could satisfy the soul and make it happy. It does not even see and enjoy the glory of God as the creation displays it, much less can it realize the blessedness which grace imparts in our Savior's kingdom.

“The god of this world has blinded the eyes of them which believe not.” 2 Cor. 4:4.

However rich the wicked may be in external possessions, they have no capacity for the enjoyment of God's gifts and for the benefits which He would confer by His bounty. Whatever earthly treasures they may accumulate, “there is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked.” Isa. 48:22. Satan, the lying god of this world, promises much to those who do him homage, but the earth does not belong to him and to those who own him as their lord, and they have only their slavery and their misery in compensation for their service to the usurping tyrant. The earth belongs to the Maker and Monarch of all, who executes His eternal purpose in the government of this world, and whose will is ultimately done, notwithstanding the mystery that He lets the devil go about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The earth is still the Lord's and He still reigns, fulfilling all His promises and making “all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” Rom. 8:28. Satan shall in due time be

cast out and committed to his own place of eternal doom, and the Lord will give His disciples the undisputed and undisturbed enjoyment of their everlasting inheritance. The earth, too, shall have its place in the blessedness of the children of God. The wickedness that is in it shall cease to cramp and harass the heirs.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying. Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.”
Rev. 21:1-4.

The children of God pass through tribulations into the full fruition of their inheritance; but their gracious Lord is always with them on their journey to supply every want and minister every needed comfort, and they never cease to rejoice in the hope of glory.

“We, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” 2 Pet. 3:13.

IV. “Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness, For They Shall Be Filled.”

The subjects of Christ’s kingdom desire to live righteously before God, and they are blessed in the realization of their desire.

1. Craving For Righteousness

Hunger and thirst express a craving that is common to man, and whose nature all can readily understand. But it is not the natural craving for bodily meat and drink to which the words here refer. There is something else that man needs besides bread for his body. He thinks of this most, because his ever recurring appetite reminds him daily of the needs of his nature. But he has a soul that also has wants and requires attention, if he would not lead a mere animal life. These spiritual wants are of more importance than the corporeal, because they pertain to a higher life, and a more lasting good, but they do not present themselves in the definite form which belongs to the craving for bodily nourishment. This clamors for immediate gratification. Therefore the hunger and thirst after righteousness is not found in all men alike, and not all, though the lack of such righteousness is common to all and is the cause of the universal unrest in the world, receive the promise that they shall be filled. Men must become weary and heavy laden in the consciousness of their sin before they will come to the Savior and find rest unto their souls.

According to the Scriptures death, which is the wages of sin, has come upon all men, for that all have sinned. In that condition of spiritual death they all lack the righteousness with which they were originally endowed and in which they were happy. Now all feel that something is lacking and their souls are not at rest, although in their spiritual blindness they seek to satisfy the craving with things that are not adapted to the want. That which really does meet the want is not according to their taste, and therefore the bread that cometh down from heaven and which would supply what is needed, is rejected. When the psalmist says, Ps. 42:1: "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God," he expresses the happy condition of a soul that has felt the loss of the divine image with its righteousness and true holiness, and has been led to know and love Him in whom the loss is retrieved and every want is supplied; and Christ would by His Holy Spirit lead all men to a realization of their lost condition and draw them to Him as their mighty Savior. The entrance of His Word giveth light respecting our deepest want and the supply furnished by infinite love and mercy in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The reader must not overlook the precious fact that it is Christ who is speaking the message of heaven to the people in His sermon on the mount, and that

the words which He speaks are spirit and life, making possible by their converting power the apprehension of the blessing promised. Not every one shall inherit it, but only those who by His grace hunger and thirst after the righteousness which He alone has to give.

That righteousness is essential for admission into the kingdom of heaven. It is the condition of mind and the quality of conduct which conforms to the will of God and accordingly to the law in which that will is revealed. This God requires of all men, "Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." Rom. 12:4. Of course the rule for such righteousness cannot be the desires and thoughts of our own hearts or of the world around us. Since sin and death have entered the world by man's transgression and fall, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," Jer. 17:9, and "the whole world lieth in wickedness." 1 John 5:19. Hence we need the rule of right which God has given us in His Word. Righteousness is obedience, inward and outward, to His holy law. "Sin is the transgression of the law;" "all unrighteousness is sin." 1 John 3:4; 5:17. "It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us." Deut. 6:25. After this our Lord would have us hunger and thirst, that we may be filled.

Seemingly all is thus said that is necessary for a correct apprehension of the righteousness to be sought. But because man naturally makes a distinction between right and wrong, notwithstanding that he is sold under sin, and thus conceives a natural righteousness which falls far short of the spiritual righteousness which God's will requires and which His law contemplates; because the principal Jewish teachers were noted for a strict observance and enforcement of the letter of the law, while they were repeatedly rebuked for their disregard and their transgression of its spirit and meaning; and because our Lord Himself, later on in His sermon, warns His hearers, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," — it is manifest that the word means more than the doing right as man conceives the right, whatever may be his inner attitude towards God and the godliness which His law demands. Let it be kept in mind that Christ proclaims the kingdom of heaven and preaches the great salvation which it embodies and which it brings to our fallen and forlorn race. That to this end He preaches the law is a matter of course; for

“...the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Gal. 3:24.

But this purpose could be attained only by teaching the spiritual import of the law, because only thus could sinners be brought to a consciousness of their unrighteousness and of their helplessness, and be induced to hear His voice calling them to the righteousness which He offers them as the Savior of the world. The hearers of the sermon were not yet prepared for a complete unfolding of the Gospel and its gracious way of salvation through faith in the righteousness which He acquired for them and for all men by His own obedience unto death, even the death of the cross; but under the tuition of the schoolmaster they were not led to another Gospel than that of the righteousness of God by faith which alone could avail for their eternal salvation. The righteousness meant by our Savior is that which is the fulfillment of the divine law in all its holy import, and that fulfillment was realized in His life and death, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

2. The Promise

The promise to those who hunger and thirst after such righteousness is that they shall be filled. They shall have what they long for: their craving shall be satisfied. A superficial view observes nothing great in such a promise as this; it may even seem trivial to many who can see nothing great in righteousness and are aware of no connection between it and the soul's eternal happiness. But it is a marvelous promise, and it offers an unspeakable blessing. The greatest need of the soul is disclosed, and the greatest gift of God to supply it is guaranteed. By the light which the Lord gives them men see their true condition. They feel so utterly empty of all the good that should be in them, and in the very feeling of emptiness they have, the prophecy of being filled with all the fulness of God. Under the tuition of the Lord's words they realize their want, and hunger and thirst after the righteousness which they lack, and by the grace of Him who came to save us they that seek shall find. It is wondrous goodness and mercy that gives poor souls, who have deserved nothing but banishment from God's presence forever, the promise of being filled with that heavenly blessing of righteousness af-

ter which they have been led to hunger and thirst. To this end Christ came into the world, that He might bear witness of the truth — the truth first concerning our sinful state and our utter inability to escape the wages of sin, and the truth concerning Himself and the great salvation which He has wrought for the whole lost world. Only hearken to His words when He speaks, and power shall come from on high to supply what these words require as well as what they promise. He makes clearer the distinction between right and wrong and makes known to us a better righteousness than that of the law; He lays bare to our eyes the wickedness and deceitfulness of our own hearts; He reveals the will of God to rescue sinners, by the redemption which He came to effect through His blood, from the curse that is upon them; He gives us His Spirit that we might believe and appropriate the blessing which He requires and imparts. Hence the apostle's prayer is

“...that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” Eph. 3:17-19.

Our gracious Savior would lead us to a knowledge of our lost estate, that we might seek refuge in Him who alone can save us from the gulf of destruction that is yawning before us. He preaches the perpetuity and severity of the law, for by this is the knowledge of sin; but He preaches this, not to the end that we may despair of all righteousness, or accept the lying conceit suggested by Satan that the filthy rags of our own righteousness will satisfy all the demands made upon us. He does not delude us with prospects of blessedness when His own law threatens damnation. His purpose is to help us and save us from the wrath to come, and therefore calls upon all to come to Him in whom there is help — in whom alone there is help. He desires to awaken a sense of our sin, that we may hunger after a righteousness which we do not possess, which we have not the power to acquire, but which is indispensable if we would escape the damnation which the righteous law proclaims against transgressors. And those who are thus brought to hunger after the righteousness which He has acquired and His Gospel graciously offers, shall be filled. Despairing of any righteousness of their own they look

to the hills whence their help cometh. They are the penitent sinners whom the Holy Spirit leads to Christ as their Savior, and who find in Him all that they are hungering for.

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Ps. 34:18.

And when they have thus been brought to embrace the great salvation in the Divine Redeemer and by faith are clothed in His righteousness, the Holy Spirit, who has purified their hearts by the faith which He has wrought, shows the way of holiness and moves them freely to walk in it.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My laws in their hearts and in their minds will I write them.” Heb. 10:16.

Thus the purpose of the law is accomplished at the same time as the deliverance from its curse and its bondage through the Gospel. And thus believers in Jesus have a better righteousness than that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, because in Christ they have justification through His atoning blood and are endowed with power from on high to live righteously and godly in this present world. For He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Tit. 2:14.

V. “Blessed Are The Merciful; For They Shall Obtain Mercy.”

The four beatitudes thus far considered all imply, that the hearers who appropriate the promise are introduced into the kingdom of Christ. His grace transfers them from the realm of sin and death to that of life and salvation. Never for a moment does the Sermon on the Mount lose sight of the fundamental truth which our Lord expressed in the words:

“Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3.

To be poor in spirit, to mourn over our sin and helplessness, to meekly recognize that without Christ we are nothing and can do nothing, and to hunger and thirst after righteousness, is not in the power of our fallen nature. It implies that power has come to us from above and made all things new, so that we become children of God,

“...giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Col. 1:12-14.

This the Scriptures variously call regeneration, conversion, repentance. Without this, which means that the soul has turned away from the slavery of sin under the dominion of Satan to the service of righteousness under the grace of our Redeemer, there is no admission into His kingdom, which is a congregation of believers. Those who think of the sermon on the mount as a mere preaching of the law, excluding all the gracious influences of the Gospel and appealing only to the natural powers of men and their reverence for righteousness under the control of conscience, have missed the whole design of Christ’s mission and work. He came to establish a kingdom of grace and salvation through the shedding of His blood for the sins of the people, and to this His teaching as well as all His other work was tributary, so that when He expounded the law it was not with the thought, that the souls in their sin still possessed powers of love and holiness which had hitherto lain dormant, and need only be aroused in order to fulfill all righteousness and render them pleasing to God. That might make Pharisees, but could not make Christians. He preached the law that men might come to a knowledge of their sin and come to Him for deliverance from its curse. But the purpose of the Lord is not fully accomplished when sinners have believed in Him and entered His kingdom. Now that they have received power from on high they still need instruction how to walk and please God. The

work of grace still goes on, and the fruit-bearing in holiness attests its presence and its progress. The promises of blessing are continued and are applied to the good fruits borne as well as to the good tree planted.

1. The Merciful Are Pronounced Blessed.

Mercy is love in its relation to the suffering and the helpless. He is merciful who does not oppress others because he has the power; who does not insist on the strict enforcement of legal right when compassion would prevent cruelty; who seeks to save the erring from the evil consequences of their error, instead of inflicting penalty to the utmost limit of the law; who feels kindly to the suffering, even though the suffering is manifestly due to their own fault; and who offers relief to the full extent of his ability, even though this involve a personal sacrifice. God is merciful. Instead of consigning a sinful world to the righteous doom of everlasting destruction, He sent His Son to save it; instead of condemning us to the perpetual gnawing of an evil conscience when He has convicted us of sin, He offers pardon and peace through His Holy Spirit by the Gospel of Christ; instead of visiting on us all the evils in this life which would result from our wrongdoing, He overrules all for the eternal good of them that hearken to His Word.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.” Ps. 103:2-4.

And this grateful recognition of God’s mercy works mercy in the believing heart.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” Luke 6:36.

This is possible when the heart that has hungered and thirsted after righteousness has been filled, “We love Him because He first loved us,” and

“have known and believed the love which God hath to us.” “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” 1 John 4:19, 20. The grace of God can render even the naturally cruel heart merciful, and under its heavenly influence all who become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus have their Father’s image renewed in them, and thus become merciful as their Father is merciful. Not as though all attained it in the same degree or any were already perfect; but all have the gift of the Spirit, who is sanctifying them. Under His tuition and blessing the children of God grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus, having their conversation in heaven and keeping daily company with their merciful Father.

2. They Shall Obtain Mercy

To these the promise is given that they shall obtain mercy. In view of the fact that the mercy of God I extends over all His creatures and that even the wicked in this life do not receive their daily judgment according to their deserts, many think the promise of little value. But it is great and precious, although unbelieving hearts are unable to appreciate it. That we live under the constant mercy of our beneficent Father in heaven, who lovingly cares for us and never ceases to bestow His bounties upon us as His own dear children, until His grace has brought us into the mansions of bliss prepared for us as our everlasting home, and that He does this while we not only merit no good thing, but deserve punishment for daily shortcomings and transgressions, — this is a greater blessing than man’s darkened understanding can realize.

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Rom. 8:32.

The promise is given to them that are merciful. Our mercy is indeed not the ground on which the mercy of God is secured to us. That thought reverses the divine order, and makes absurd the expectation which it excites in the proud heart. God’s mercy always precedes ours, and must precede it to

make ours possible. He is merciful to us, and blesses us, giving us the ability, which is not ours by nature, to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. Those who trust in His mercy, by which their lives are crowned with blessing, never think of claiming merit for the mercy which they are enabled to exercise towards their fellowmen.

“What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou didst not receive it?” 1 Cor. 4:7.

But the fact remains that the merciful have the promise that they shall obtain mercy, and this fact must not be disregarded. God shows us mercy, else we would not have been redeemed by the Savior’s vicarious obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, and would never have believed in Him and come to Him that we might have life. And it is only because of His mercy that we, after we have been brought into His kingdom and made heirs of heaven, are graciously preserved in faith and receive daily pardon of our sins, including the manifold imperfections in our works of mercy. If that mercy did not endure forever, there would be no promise given that we shall obtain mercy during our whole pilgrimage on earth and shall enter into the joys of our Lord when the trial and struggle is over. The believer shall obtain mercy in the end, as he received it in the beginning to become a merciful child of our merciful Father.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Ps. 23:6.

We can merit nothing for all the good that God hath wrought in us, and the more we realize His blessings the less can we dream of merit before Him. But if men reject the mercies of God, and refuse all divine grace that would enable them to appreciate these mercies and render their hearts merciful after His likeness, their damnation is just. Rejecting all offers of mercy while they lived, they could not be recipients of that mercy after death, when the world shall be judged in righteousness. The promise of mercy is to the mer-

ciful, whose Father in heaven is merciful. Even in the administration of His government here on earth, though we see but dimly the ways along which He leads His children to the eternal glory, the merciful obtain mercy. “Blessed is He that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” Ps. 41:2. But in the final settlement of all accounts it will become fully manifest that the merciful are blessed, for they shall obtain mercy.

VI. “Blessed Are The Pure In Heart; For They Shall See God.”

Those who come to Jesus and hearken to His gracious Word become new creatures, and theirs shall be the beatific vision of God in His glory.

1. What Pure Means

When the Savior speaks of some as pure in heart, the whole situation shows that the words do not mean to, represent a portion of mankind as naturally pure, nor that the effect of His preaching is to give willing hearers absolute freedom from all stains of sin and render their hearts at once perfectly holy. That would contradict what the Holy Spirit says through St. John:

“If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:8.

The true disciple of Christ is one who hears and believes His Word, and the truth makes him free from the condemnation he deserves. The Savior is made to him sanctification as well as redemption.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:6, 7.

Thus a pure people is gathered in Christ as a holy congregation through faith in, His name. Wherever the Gospel is preached, among Jews and Gentiles alike, the power of God unto salvation is exerted to work faith and cleanse the heart. Hence heathens were converted and healed by divine grace as well as those who were in the covenant by circumcision.

“God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:8-9.

Only in the kingdom of God is the power of divine grace exerted by which sinners are made pure in heart, and only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can that kingdom be entered. Our Savior preached the Gospel unto salvation as well as expounded the law unto the knowledge of sin, and those who hear Him and keep His Word are His disciples indeed. None but believers in the Savior of the world can be pure in heart and inherit the promise that they shall see God.

But as the sanctification of believing hearts is a process that continues until the journey of life through this wilderness of sin is completed, and the redeemed soul awakes in God’s likeness and is satisfied, the purity of heart, which all believers have in its incipiency and potency, has its degrees and its gradual growth. Perfect purity is the aim and goal of all who are sincere in their devotion to the Savior, and they continue steadily to strive after it as they follow in His steps, without flattering themselves that they have attained His spotless holiness or cloaking the sin which manifests their shortcoming. All are blessed in the possession of salvation by faith through His grace, but their goal of perfection in holiness is not reached as long as their work on earth is not yet finished and their good fight of faith is not yet completed. The will of God is their sanctification, and as they desire to do His

will, that is the object of their daily effort and the import of their daily prayer. Led by the Holy Spirit they do not permit the carnal thought to dampen their zeal, that they have done enough and suffered enough to be exempt from further evil and conflict, and that they may now cease from their labors, although the evening has not yet come and the Lord has not yet called them to rest.

“He that endureth to the end shall be saved,” Matt. 10:22.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,”
Rev. 2:10.

If we would attain to higher blessing in this life and steadfastly pursue the glory of that which is to come, we must not grow weary of the struggle against the world and the flesh and the devil.

“Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” Eph. 4:22-24.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections not on things of the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory,” Col. 3:1-4.

“He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure,” 2 Pet. 1:9-10.

These admonitions show us what “pure in heart” means. It is the heart that by faith has put on Christ, and in His power renounces the lusts of the flesh and the hidden things of dishonesty and is fixed upon God and His Word, without duplicity and dissimulation. Such a heart is by grace rendered simple in its trust in God and sincere in its dealings with man.

“Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry, for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience,” Col. 3:5, 6.

The pure in heart can have no pleasure in the filth of sin. Nor can they find delight in misleading or injuring or offending their neighbors.

“The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned, from which some having swerved have turned aside to vain jangling.” 1 Tim. 5:6.

“If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,” Jas. 3:14-17.

The purity that Christ desires in His disciples and that His Spirit works in the hearts of them that believe, is not that which earthly wisdom may conceive and practice as an external accomplishment which wins admiration and keeps ceremonially clean, but that which comes from above and renders everything that is contaminated with sin an abomination in Christian eyes, as it is in the sight of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil

and can not look upon iniquity. Having daily communion with God, the Holy One, and striving to be more like Him as the beauty of holiness becomes daily more precious, the grateful child of God gives earnest heed to the admonition, “Keep thyself pure,” 1 Tim. 5:22.

2. The Promise

The promise to the pure in heart is that they shall see God. At first glance this might seem inconsistent with some passages of Scripture indicating the impossibility of such a vision. He is a Spirit and therefore in His nature invisible. Thus it is said:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him,” John 1:18.

And again St. Paul says of Him:

“Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see; to whom be honor and power everlasting,” 1 Tim. 6:16.

As God is a Spiritual Being it is perfectly natural that He should be represented as invisible to the natural eye. But the words quoted themselves show that the blessing which our Lord pronounces upon the pure in heart is not in conflict, but in perfect harmony with them. Man cannot with His bodily eye see the Maker and Monarch of all; but the Son hath declared Him, so that what is impossible by nature becomes actual through supernatural revelation. Christ says:

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” John 14:9.

For He is God over all, blessed for ever, and He and the Father are one. Therefore He says:

“This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life,” John 6:40.

The revelation given enables us to see God in His incarnate Son, “And this is life eternal that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” The blessing pronounced upon the pure in heart, whose eyes are purged that they may behold in Christ their God and their Redeemer, is the everlasting life which believers enjoy here and in its fulness hereafter.

Seeing God is knowing Him as the Gospel has revealed and faith has received Him. In proportion as our hearts are progressively purified by faith in that Gospel of grace our capacity for seeing God and realizing the promised blessedness increases. Our Lord say:

“If any one will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,” John 7:17.

Only those whose hearts are renewed by the Spirit of God can know Him and the precious truth which He declares.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” 1 Cor. 2:14.

“Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” in which He is revealed and His heavenly treasures are dispensed. Having entered that kingdom, the path of the loyal subjects of the King becomes ever plainer. “Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness,” Ps. 112:4. And this increases in brightness as we apply the grace given us, according to the exhortation:

“Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” 2 Pet. 3:18.

Believers thus experience what is written, “The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” Prov. 4:18.

In that perfect day, when the mists of this world shall have cleared away, the pure in heart shall realize more fully the promised vision of God.

“For now we see through a glass darkly, but then shall I know even as also I am known,” 1 Cor. 13:12.

We know God now as our reconciled Father, who is ever present with us to direct our way, to supply our wants, to defend us against foes, and to comfort us in our tribulation, but it is in faith and hope, “as seeing Him who is invisible,” Heb. 11:27. Whatever raptures of bliss may be exceptionally granted to consecrated hearts, in visions of Jesus and the glory of angels around His throne, even while pursuing their pilgrimage on earth, there is no indication that these are the blessing which our Savior had in view when He promised that the pure in heart should see God, or that such ecstasies are designed for all believers in this earthly life, where we must fight the good fight of faith and be content to pass through much tribulation into the kingdom of glory. But when our pilgrimage is ended and we by our Savior’s grace have kept the faith, we shall see Him face to face and enjoy the beautiful vision forever. The seeing shall be intuitive and direct as when a man looks upon the face of his brother, and we shall know Him with that unerring completeness with which He knows us. We know Him now, and are blessed in the knowledge; but we shall know Him more perfectly and more blissfully when we shall awake in His likeness at the resurrection of our bodies, glorified to see His glorious face. The complete realization of the blessedness promised to the pure in heart is therefore yet in store for us in our Father’s house, and is an object of hope to cheer us on our journey.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure,”
1 John 3:2, 3.

VII. “Blessed Are The Peacemakers, For They Shall Be Called The Children Of God.”

Making peace on earth becomes the children of God, and they who fulfill this mission receive their Father’s blessing.

1. Christ’s Words of Peace

Amid the jarring and jangling, the strife and confusion which sin has brought into the world, Christ speaks words of peace and by His grace renders His disciples peacemakers in the community. Righteousness originally united all things in a harmonious whole, in which the good will of God was done by all His creatures. But this was of short duration. The creature that was formed in God’s own image sinned, and dissolution and ruin was the result. Disregarding the will of his Maker, by which alone harmony and happiness could exist, every man consulted his own will and chose his own course. Thus every one was for himself and all in contention with each other, because each one had a will of his own and lived unto himself. It was this that made necessary the coming of the Prince of Peace to rescue the ruined world from the curse that was upon it, that in the possession of salvation by faith in Him peace might be restored. This is what the apostle means when he says:

“The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead; and that He died for all, that they should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again,” 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

In man's natural condition there is no peace and there are no peacemakers. In this as in all the other beatitudes the Lord does not find certain persons who are qualified by nature to receive the blessings of His kingdom, but He gives His quickening Word to men in their lost estate and thereby turns to Him the hearts of such as hear it and are willing to heed it.

By peacemakers is therefore not meant a class of men who naturally are of a more conciliatory disposition than others and who accordingly are by inborn endowments better fitted for the kingdom of God. There are no such people. All are born in sin, and the works of the flesh are the same in all. There are indeed some whom love of ease makes averse to strife and who would rather make concessions to the selfishness of their neighbors than have their quiet disturbed by contending against wrongs; and there are some who, seeing the advantage of living peaceably among their fellow men, by efforts of their will curb the outbreaks of their petulant and contentious passions and thus impress others as men of peace. But that is a prudent discipline exercised by reason over selfishness in order to gratify it in another form that seems more profitable. It is well for the community that not all have the pugnacious temperament which is ready for a fight on any trivial provocation, though reason would dictate forbearance in the interest of self. They are not men of peace, and even when they exert their influence to have a quiet neighborhood, they are not the self-denying peacemakers contemplated in the Savior's blessing. He means people to whom the kingdom of heaven has come and to whom He has brought the peace of heaven, according to the words of inspiration: "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and our Lord's own words:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you," Rom. 5:1; John 14:27.

He stills the storms which sin has aroused in the world, stills them first in our own hearts, that we may become peacemakers to others.

"Now the Lord of peace give you peace always by all means," 2 Thess. 3:16.

The first song that was sung at our Savior's birth was that of the angelic host,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,” Luke 2:14.

This implies that His disciples shall find rest for their souls in Him. Then those who realize the peace which He gives are led by the Spirit to bring His peace to all within their reach, and of course to live in peace with all about them.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,” Rom. 12:18.

It lies in the renewed nature of believers that they strive to impart to others the heavenly blessings which the grace of God has bestowed upon them, that all the world may enjoy what the Savior secured for all. They are thus the peacemakers, their faith working by love, that there may be peace on earth through the good tidings which shall be to all people.

2. The Blessing

The blessing pronounced upon these is that they shall be called the children of God. It is a glorious gift, but it can be realized only through faith in the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name,” John 1:12.

Not our endeavors to find peace by abounding in good works to appease our conscience, nor our labors to preserve or bring about peace among our quarrelsome neighbors can make us children of God. That would be reversing the order of divine grace, which renders us children of God through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Having received

the Spirit of adoption and by its power possessing peace and seeking peace with all men, we shall manifest that we are children of God and be recognized and honored as such.

Were it not that so many nominal Christians have but a low appreciation of the great blessing and high prerogative expressed by the term children of God, we would not deem it necessary, when addressing professed disciples of Christ, to emphasize the remark, that He does not use the appellation in the wide sense in which it is often taken and in which it embraces all the children of men, unbelievers as well as believers. Because all men are creatures of God, as their Maker He is in a figurative sense called their Father. But our Lord distinguishes those who are His from those who reject Him. Not all are children of God, but only those who receive Him and believe on His name. Not all are promised the blessing of being called children of God, but only those who are peacemakers. Sonship with God is a glorious gift which can be ours only through the Savior.

“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,” Gal. 3:26.

The idea of a fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, embracing the whole human race as having a common origin in the one Creator of heaven and earth, so that all have equal access to God and are equally acceptable to Him on the basis of such natural relation, is foreign to the Scriptures and pernicious in its influence. The Gospel knows nothing of a coming to the Father without the mediation of Christ and the atonement made through His blood, and of an adoption into the family of God, with all the grace and glory which this involves, without faith in the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Jesus says:

“I am the way and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me,” John 14:6.

It is a fatal delusion when on the basis of nature and natural relations and efforts the hope is entertained and the promises are claimed which God

gives His children. By nature all are children of wrath, and without Christ we can do nothing, and have therefore nothing to expect but the indignation and wrath which is revealed against every soul of man that doeth evil. That the peacemakers shall be called the children of God is owing to their relationship by faith to the Savior. None but those who receive Him are endowed with the precious gift.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” Rom. 8:14-17.

He is the Only Begotten of the Father, the Eternal Son by nature, and only in Him, who is Heir of all things, do we by adoption become partakers of His blessing. By faith in Him, and only by faith which joins us to Him, is God truly our Father and are we His children indeed. The promised blessing is great and glorious, and becomes increasingly so as we more and more realize its heavenly import.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,” 1 John 3:1, 2.

Christians, being blessed with such privileges and enjoying such hopes, should be diligent to exercise their gifts and adorn the doctrine which they profess by manifesting themselves as peacemakers in the community. With the peace of God in their hearts and the commission to bring it to the hearts of others by the Gospel, it is meet that they should lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.” Phil. 2:3.

In their intercourse with brethren in the church this will lead them to avoid all questions and conduct that engender strife; and in their social relations it will protect them against the sins of the tongue that are so frequent and that do so much toward fomenting ill-feeling and distressing contentions among neighbors. Children of God must not engage in gossip that tends to tarnish the good name of honorable members of the community, and the least that they can do in charity, when others assail their reputation, is to speak well of the absent and defend them against injurious reports. In all things their calling is to be peacemakers, that as such they may inherit the promised blessing.

VIII. “Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted For Righteousness’ Sake, For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven.”

“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.”

1. The Prospect of Persecutions

That to the good qualities required of the members of Christ’s kingdom and the rich blessings promised them should finally be added a prospect of persecutions and a benediction upon their patient endurance, must not surprise us. Our journey to the promised land is not completed, and our warfare against the foes that beset our path is not ended, when the grace of our Savior has brought us into His kingdom and made us partakers of its righteous-

ness and its great salvation. “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.” Matt. 10:22. But before the end comes there is work to be done and a warfare to be waged. We are called to be laborers in His vineyard, we are enlisted as soldiers in His army. The world hates the sincere followers of the Savior as it hated Him; the devil is a strong and wily foe, who is ever going about seeking whom he may devour. Our own flesh is in secret league with the devil and the world, and naturally shuns hard work and hot battles. Therefore constant vigilance and prayer are necessary, if in the end we would say with St. Paul:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” 2 Tim. 4:7, 8.

In passing through the enemy’s country, which this world that lieth in wickedness undoubtedly is, we must expect hardships and tribulations; for the spirit of Christians and the spirit of the world are never in agreement.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.

That is one of the hardest lessons that our Lord’s disciples have to learn. Nothing is more natural than that the devil and the world and the flesh should hate the children of God and hamper and harass them in their work and their progress heavenward, and that they should assault and persecute them, but nothing is more natural either than that the flesh should shrink from the fiery trial. The conflict is inevitable; but we are warned that only they who are faithful unto death can obtain the crown of life.

“If the world hate you,” saith our Lord, “ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not Him that sent Me.” John 15:18-21.

In its very essence Christianity is not congenial to the world that lieth in wickedness; therefore it lies in the nature of things that the followers of Christ must pass through tribulations into the kingdom of glory in heaven. Christians who will not learn this simple lesson, but seek to live a life of self-indulgent ease and luxury while professing to follow Christ, can hardly be said to have passed from death unto life and made their calling and election sure.

“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”
Matt. 16:24.

2. Those Who Suffer Persecution For The Lord’s Sake Are Blessed.

What seems a loss is really a gain to them. “Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” The great salvation which Christ secured for all, and which He imparts to believers through His life-giving Word, enriches them beyond all that the world can give or take away, and the sufferings through which they must pass are amply compensated by the pleasures which shall be theirs forevermore at His right hand. Nay, these sufferings themselves become blessings under God’s gracious guidance by directing our thoughts away from the miseries and vanities of earth to the joys and realities of heaven. For we are

“...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Rom. 8:17, 18.

Therefore Christians, when they are called to bear the cross after their beloved Lord, painful as this may be for the moment, are blessed; for they are in their blessed Savior’s company, who makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. “In the world ye shall have tribulations,” He tells us, “but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. A little while and all the discomforts of the wilderness will be past, and the complete realization of the blessings awaiting His people in the promised land shall be ours.

“Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience, and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed.” Rom. 5:1-4.

3. The High Calling. Matthew 5:13-16.

THE HEARERS who did not stubbornly resist and eventually reject the gracious words of life which Christ presented, but in faith accepted the promises given in the Beatitudes, entered His kingdom. In this they received a calling and a mission which raised them high above all that the earth could give. They are inducted into a kingdom which is not of this world and whose purposes and powers lie in a higher sphere than any which this world knows. But it is a kingdom which, though it is of eternal duration and deals with things that are of everlasting import, is established upon this earth, and whose heavenly influence is designed to permeate and regenerate this world which lieth in wickedness and rescue it from the death to which its sin has doomed it. Every one who enters this kingdom receives the vocation and is endowed with power from on high to be a coworker with God to promote its gracious purpose as he enjoys its heavenly blessings in the hope of glory. Not only the preachers of the Gospel, who receive a special calling to the public duties of the ministerial office, but every child of God is enlisted for the work.

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” 1 Pet. 2:9, 10.

In the kingdom of God there are manifold duties to be performed and manifold gifts imparted for their performance, and the Lord assigns to each

member his place and station, that the best possible use may be made of all the gifts for the common benefit.

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord, And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” 1 Cor. 12:4-7.

There are, therefore, special callings to which special corresponding duties are committed. But all have the general calling to serve the Lord and His kingdom, each in the place assigned him.

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” Rom. 12:4.5.

This general vocation of the members our Lord expresses under the figure of salt and light.

I. Salt

“Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savor 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 an article so widely known and used that its employment as a figure is easily understood, although figurative modes of speech always cause more or less difficulty which words used in their strict sense do not present. The purpose of salt is to prevent decay and to impart savor and taste. It is a preservative and a relish. Applied to food it prevents putrefaction, and renders agreeable to the palate what would otherwise be insipid. “Can that

which is unsavory be eaten without salt?” Hence it was ordered to be used in sacrifices.

“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.” Lev. 2:13.

It was a symbol of purity. The offering should not be putrid or unseasoned. Therefore our Lord commands His disciples:

“Have salt in yourselves and have peace one with another.” Mark 9:50.

And St. Paul says:

“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how to answer every man.” Col. 4:6.

The members of Christ’s kingdom are called not only to have salt and faithfully to use it, but to be the salt of the earth. They themselves are designed to be a purifying element in the mass of corruption which mankind has become through the malignant work of Satan. Sin has brought death into the world, with all the decay and dissolution which this implies. The Son of God was made flesh and dwelt among us that He might deliver the fallen world from the rottenness which has come upon it and the utter ruin which must result if the work of sin and death is not arrested. He came to save that which was lost, offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and introducing a new life as the second Adam in whom all men may again obtain what was lost when the first Adam sinned and death ensued. Thus death was swallowed up in victory and a peculiar people was gathered, whose hearts were purified by faith and who should be a salt for the purification of others. When the sermon on the mount was preached He had in-

deed not yet effected the atonement upon the cross; but in the counsels of God the work of redemption was finished, and therefore the Scriptures speak of the “book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Rev. 13:8. He established His kingdom on earth by His Word, and those who believed the heavenly truth which He preached entered in and were blessed. So it is still. As many as receive Him as He is presented in the Gospel of His grace unto salvation, pass from death unto life and share His victory over sin and death. They are the salt of the earth, preserving from putrefaction and seasoning; all that hear His voice and come unto Him.

They are the salt through whom, by the appointment and blessing of God, salvation should come to all the ends of the earth.

Such a salt Christian believers are by their teaching and their lives. Primarily they are this by the Word which they have received, and which is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe. By it we have been brought into the kingdom of God ourselves, and by it others, to whom we are commissioned to bring the Gospel, are empowered to enter it and enjoy its heavenly blessings. The fact that, according to our Lord’s ordinance, preachers of the Gospel are to receive a special call by the Church before they are authorized to perform the public functions of the ministry and assume the pastoral office, has led some to entertain the opinion that only such as hold this special office are the salt of the earth. There is no reason in the text and the circumstances, as there is none in the nature of the subject set forth, that would justify such a limitation of the powers and privileges and duties of believers in Christ, who are a peculiar people and a royal priesthood and as such have the calling in common to show forth the praises of Him who has called them to His marvelous light. The Gospel is given to every believer, else he could not be a member of Christ’s kingdom, and the command is given to every one to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ, that others too may enjoy them.

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 10:32, 33.

The confession of Christ, to which the Spirit in our hearts as well as the command of the Lord moves His people, means making Him and His saving truth known to all around us; and this is so necessary to the fulfillment of the Christian vocation and to the accomplishment of the design of His kingdom on earth that fidelity to Him is inconceivable without it.

“The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom. 10:8-10.

It is in pursuance of this high calling as the salt of the earth that not only each individual believer tells others, as opportunity offers, of the great salvation in Christ and the glorious hope of His disciples, but also that members who have the same faith join together in congregations, call ministers for the stated preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments in public office, worship Him together with the Father and the Holy Spirit in regular public worship, and make all the necessary arrangements for missionary work and the preservation and extension of His kingdom on earth. They are the salt by whose purifying and preserving power, exerted through the divinely appointed means of grace, a holy Church is gathered out of the mass of corruption and sanctified as a temple of the Holy Spirit, in which the praises of God are shown forth to all people, and from which the Savior’s call goes out unceasingly; “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

But also by their life they have the high calling to be the salt of the earth. This is secondary, but not on that account of little importance. It is secondary, because we live by the grace of our Lord, not by the holiness of our lives, which is an effect of that grace, and because others are brought to Jesus by the Word and Sacrament which are given us, not by our devices and our efforts. But our lives of devoted service are designed to confirm the testimony of our lips, to commend it as a precious gift of heaven for man’s everlasting welfare, and thus to be an auxiliary in the fulfillment of our mission as the salt of the earth. The Christian life is not strictly a means of

grace. But it is that which results when the grace offered in them is appropriated by faith, and which makes the believer active in plying these means, privately and publicly, that the grace may be offered through the means to ever increasing multitudes. The Lord does not say that the grace and truth which saves the soul and which has made the believer the salt of the earth, can be dispensed with when once a body of believers has been gathered. The saved sinner can never be a substitute for the Gospel, however holy his life may become. That alone by which God saved him can be effectual to save others. His zeal may and should bring the Gospel to many who are yet in darkness, but it is God alone that saves, and does this by the Word and Sacraments as the means which He has chosen for the purpose. The life is in Christ, and only from His fulness can any soul receive it. "I am the way and the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." John 14:6. And as He alone has this life, so He imparts it only by His Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." John 6:63. And St. Peter says:

"See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever." 1 Pet. 1:23.

Without this living and life-giving Word no man is turned from Satan to God. It is the means chosen by infinite wisdom to do His saving work. Nor does this Word derive its power from the holiness of converted men: it is the power of God, otherwise there would be no converted men. Neither does it receive any addition of power or increase of efficacy because he who proclaims it is a believer and thus belongs to the salt of the earth. The power of God is capable of no increase, and it is only the pride of man, which lacks salt, that suggests the vain thought that any human being, lost in sin and saved only by grace, can contribute anything to his own salvation or to the power of the Divine Word by which that salvation is effected. Therefore we should hear the Word of God and trust its saving power even if the ministers declaring it are themselves not obedient to its heavenly voice.

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: all therefore whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works; for they say, and do not.” Matt. 23:2, 3.

In no case is it the preacher who is the source of the grace and the life. He is simply the bearer of the Word in which is life.

And yet we would not apprehend the complete meaning of our Lord’s words if we concluded that Christians are declared to be the salt of the earth only because they are agents of God to make known His purifying and life-giving Gospel. That is indeed the heavenly salt that preserves the world from utter putrefaction and otherwise inevitable destruction; and they undoubtedly are such beneficent agents of our gracious Savior. Without controversy, this is a high and glorious calling. But the grace that has made them this has made them more. They themselves are endowed with the unspeakable treasures in Christ which liy the Gospel they are to bear to others for their equal enrichment. By faith they are joined in a vital union with Him who is in the primary and proper sense the salt of the earth and from whom all its restoring and preserving power proceeds. Believers are in Him who is the Savior of the world, and they rejoice in hope of the glory which is His and which he shares with His faithful followers.

“I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,” Gal. 2:20.

The company of believers is one body with Him; “for we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones,” Eph. 5:30. Therefore grace and peace is multiplied to the members of His Church,

“...according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,” 2 Pet. 1:3, 4.

They are made the salt of the earth by receiving from the fulness of His grace the heavenly and everlasting life which makes them kings and priests unto God and in virtue of which their names are written in heaven. Hence to them, not to the unbelieving world, are the means of grace committed for administration, that through their ministry the world might receive the blessing of spiritual life and eternal salvation. Not that the efficacy of the Gospel and its accompanying sacraments, which are the Lords appointed means for the conveyance of this blessing, is in any sense or in any measure conditioned by the godliness of those who are honored with the call to administer them. The Savior gives us assurance of salvation through the promises of the Gospel, and it is an impeachment of both His wisdom and His love to presume that He has put it in the power of ministers to make these promises of none effect by their unbelief. It must never be overlooked that Christ is Himself the source of all spiritual life and salvation, and that the means which He has instituted for the communication of His gracious merit and power owe their saving efficacy to Him alone, not to the ministers whom He sends to dispense them. If any of these should prove unfaithful, that would not deprive the divine institution of its validity or render the truth of God false and powerless. The Lord would be faithful still, and of course His Word and Sacrament would still retain their heavenly potency and accomplish that whereunto He sent them. But these means are by divine ordinance entrusted to Christian believers, and they by the possession of the grace and of the means to communicate it are the salt of the earth. Their life of loving service under the direction of the Holy Spirit is a constant rebuke of the corruption that is in the world and a standing appeal to men to come to Jesus and embrace the salvation to which they bear testimony by their words and by their lives. No doubt many a community, whose offense is rank and smells to heaven, would perish from the earth if this salt were not present to make its rescue and recovery possible, and if God in His good

providence did not preserve it for the purpose of giving that salt the opportunity to do its work of arresting the rottenness and saving such as may be led to repentance. Indeed, it is questionable whether this world, after Satan had made it his realm of wickedness, would have continued to exist at all, had not God in His infinite love provided a Savior and a saved people to be the salt of the earth, in order to rescue it from destruction and eventually to make a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The disciples of Christ would not be faithful to their Lord if they did not diligently exert the grace given them for His service, and seek to fulfill their high calling as the salt of the earth by strenuous work in His kingdom. Not only should they embrace all opportunities given them to impart the Gospel truth to their neighbors and associates and to maintain it against gainsayers, but by uniting with the Christian congregation and cooperating with brethren of the same faith support the public ministry of the Church and its missions and works of education and mercy. In this all should engage to the extent of their ability, that the knowledge of Christ and His unsearchable riches might be spread in all lands and the God of our salvation might be glorified throughout the earth. The redeemed of the Lord must not stand all the day idle, while millions around them are perishing and the Master calls them to work. It is true, the great salvation in the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, is a gift of grace and can not be merited by our labor of love or purchased with our money. But the indolent and self-indulgent, who deport themselves as if the will of God that all the world should be saved, did not concern them, should see to it that on the judgment day they are not taken at their idle word and pronounced outside of the gracious sphere of that salvation which they foolishly declared to be none of their concern.

“Take heed what ye hear; with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath,” Mark 4:24, 25.

The Christian who employs his gifts and does not grow weary in well-doing grows stronger day by day; but he who refuses to exercise his gifts, which are bestowed for the common good, will lose them and in the end be lost,

not because he did not do enough work to merit salvation, which lies in no man's power, but because he received the grace of God in vain. For if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?

And in another respect the Christian should be mindful of his high calling as the salt of the earth and make it effective in his life. An ungodly walk reflects shame upon the cause which we profess as followers of Christ; holiness of life, corresponding to the holy calling which we have received as children of God through faith in His name, commends the Savior to our fellow men as worthy of all acceptance. Our good works have no merit by which our own sinful souls could be saved, much less could they avail for the salvation of others; but they do call attention to the Gospel with its proclamation of pardon and peace, and to the Church with its cloud of witnesses and its means of grace, and many are thus induced to hear the Word of God and then by its power to believe the truth in Jesus and inherit the promises. And when believers engage assiduously in the proper work of the Church, which is the publication of the Gospel and the administration of the Holy Sacraments in all the world, their activity as the salt of the earth in such ministry, publicly through the support of the pastoral office in all its varied functions and privately in their intercourse with their fellow men and especially with their associates in the Church, they will manifest themselves as a salt in the community whose labor will result in arresting corruption and purifying the souls with which it is brought into contact.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord,” 1 Cor. 15:58.

Thus will the disciples of Christ show “all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things,” Tit. 2:10.

The salt, so far as it is the possession of believers, may lose its saltiness, that is, while the preserving and seasoning power of divine grace remains the same, the Christian may lose the saltiness which the Savior had bestowed. But in Him the saltiness remains. Neither He nor the salvation which He effected can ever lose their power. Of His kingdom there shall be no end, and His is an everlasting salvation. But there is a respect in which the salt may lose its savor and become unprofitable. Though all the saltiness

comes from Him, without whom we are nothing and can do nothing. He does not directly refer to Himself when He says to His disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” He points out the blessedness and the high calling of those who by His grace have been rescued from the corruption that is in the world. And to this He adds the warning: “But if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.” Christians may become heedless of their gracious endowments and negligent of their high calling, losing their salt by failing to use it for their own seasoning and to impart it to others for their spiritual benefit. They may become careless in the use of the means of grace, and cease to meditate on those glorious things which are spoken of Christ and His kingdom and in the possession of which they once found their chief joy. They may grow indifferent to the heavenly truth of which the Savior bears witness and to the holiness by which believers are called and qualified to adorn the doctrine. They may gradually abandon the application of the salt to their own hearts and lives and, neglecting the beauty and the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven, return to the beggarly elements of the world that lieth in wickedness. In short, believers may turn away from their blessed Savior and abandon their holy calling; they may fall from grace and lose their saltness, ceasing thus to belong to the blessed company who are the salt of the earth.

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,” 1 Cor. 10:12.

“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” Matt. 26:41.

The salt may become good for nothing, and the person who once was purified may return to his wallowing in the mire of sin. It is a perilous doctrine, which some even have the hardihood to preach in their churches, but which Satan instills into the minds of many who do not hear it publicly proclaimed, that when a person has once become a believer in Christ he can never return to the service of Satan and be eternally lost. Such opinions

beget a carnal security that has ruined many who once witnessed a good confession.

“If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb. The dog is turned to his own vomit again and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire,” 2 Pet. 2:20-22.

When it becomes manifest that a believer has turned his back upon the Savior and impenitently persists in his sins, the Church, loyally and earnestly intent upon preserving its own purity and its testimony to the truth in Jesus, has no alternative but to cast out the apostate as salt that has lost its savor, and could henceforth be only an element of deception and danger in the congregation.

II. Light

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Upon the gloom which hangs over the earth a glorious sun has arisen.

“The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” Isa, 9:2.

Sin brought mental and moral night upon the world, in which men grope without a star to guide them in matters pertaining to the eternal welfare of their souls. But the promise of grace and salvation, which God gave immediately on the deadly advent of sin, is fulfilled, and the King bids Zion to be glad.

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is arisen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall rise upon thee and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” Isa. 60:1-3.

God has gloriously fulfilled His gracious promise, and the darkness is dispelled by the Day spring from on high. When Jesus preached to the people the great light was shining on earth; and when by its brightness disciples were conducted into His kingdom, they too were made shining lights to illumine the world. In the Savior was life, and the life was the light of men.

Christ is Himself the light of the world, without whom there would be and could be nothing but spiritual darkness. If God had not “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” darkness would still cover the earth and gross darkness the people. Death would still reign in a world of gloom if the Savior had not come. He is the Sun of Righteousness that hath risen with healing in His wings. He is the Dayspring from on high that hath visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. “I am the light of the world,” He tells us; “he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” John 8:12. The darkness flees where He appears; the soul is full of light when He enters. “As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world,” He assures us; and those who believe His assurance and receive Him by faith as their Savior, see the great light and no longer walk in darkness and travel through the gloom to death. How pitiful that so many turn away from Him when He comes to them, and close their eyes against the light which brightly shines around them and would show them the way of salvation.

“Jesus said unto them, yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be children of light.”
John 12:35, 36.

Alas, it was then as it is now. The light was disregarded by the multitude, who would rather sit in the darkness of their sin than to humble themselves by confessing their iniquity and their helplessness and accepting deliverance by grace alone.

“And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” John 3:19.

Christ is the light of the world, as He is the life. Whatever knowledge of God and spiritual things was in man by his creation after the image of God, was driven out of the soul by the entrance of sin, and there could be no restoration of the happy relation which existed between it and its Maker by the exertion of the faculties that sin rendered impotent and helpless. The effect of man's apostasy from God was darkness and death. He no longer knew the way of happiness in communion with the Father of lights, and he had no spiritual life in him to walk in that holy way if any glimmerings of it should come to him. The wages of sin is death. The promised Savior must therefore, if help was to be afforded in man's forlorn condition, bring life to the lost in order to bring light into their darkness. This was accomplished by the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” He is the revelation of the Father's love, who sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He brings into the world a new spiritual life, which is designed to enter the soul by the Holy Spirit's power through faith and take the place of the death which reigns through sin. And that dispels the darkness and enables us to see the goodness of our God and the great salvation which His grace has prepared for our ruined race.

“For with thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light.” Ps. 36:9.

The life came in the incarnate Son of God, and that brought light into the sin-benighted world.

“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me should not abide in darkness.” John 12:46.

That light shines in the world through the Word which is preached, and which is written for our learning by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture. Christ is no longer visibly present on the earth, but His power is still exerted in the words which He spake and still speaks. Through that His life is imparted and His light shines now, as it did when He addressed the multitudes nearly two thousand years ago. With His Word He is always present, though we see Him not, according to His promise, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” His enlightening work has been going on in the world during all those centuries since He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. “The words which I speak unto you,” He says, “they are spirit and they are life.” They are so always, and the life has always remained the light of man. In our night of sin we know nothing of God and His thoughts and intents touching our present life and our future destiny. What little our observation and science of nature and of the powers and operations of our minds reveal to us of Him and the plan and purpose of His government, leaves us ignorant of our mission here and our condition hereafter. Whence we come and whither we are going or, assuming that some knowledge of a Creator and His eternal power and Godhead has been gathered from the things that are made, what our Maker has placed us here for and what He intends to do with us when death puts an end to our career on earth, we do not know and have no natural means of ascertaining. With all our science and philosophy the earth is dark, and in regard to the most important matters of our life all our learning leaves us in the dark. God alone knows and He alone can tell us what we are and what shall become of us. The light must come from heaven, if the darkness of earth is to be dispelled. Even the sin and death that are matters of such constant and sorrow-

ful experience to us all, are but superficially understood, and in the main are mysteries that we strive in vain to solve and about which our philosophy speculates to little purpose. And when we are conscious that something is radically wrong with us and we are unhappy, and observe that this unhappiness is the common lot, reason knows no remedy, and all its devices to give us rest from the troubles that are upon us have proved utter failures. All the light that nature gives leaves us in the dark about our sinful souls and their relation to the Judge of all the earth, though we do feel, notwithstanding all the pride of sin, that we are dependent and accountable creatures. We need light in this darkness, and God is good. The light of the world has come. He is the mighty Savior from sin and death, who gives us the light of salvation.

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” John 1:18.

He makes known to us the will of God and the way of escape from sin and death, and at the same time and by the same means introduces spiritual life and light into dead souls and darkened understandings. Therefore the Scriptures speak with so much frequency and so much emphasis of the grace and truth in Jesus. By His grace we are to know the truth unto salvation, and of that heavenly truth He is the embodiment and witness. To a question of Pilate He answered:

“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice.” John 18:37.

His light shines into our hearts when we receive that witness by the Gospel. This is His gracious means of communicating the light of life.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31, 32.

The Word of God, which embodies and sets forth the truth unto salvation, brings to men the life and the light which is in Christ alone, and preserves them unto salvation by keeping them in union with the Savior by faith. Hence He prays to the Father:

“Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth.” John 17:17.

But our Lord speaks not only of Himself, who is the way and the truth and the life, as the light of the world that illumines its darkness. He is the source of that light, but He speaks also of His disciples as witnesses of the saving truth and bearers of the heavenly light. Those who by His grace are brought to believe in Him as their Lord and Savior, are themselves called the light of the world, though they are entirely dependent upon the original light as it emanates from the Son of God. This is primarily because the same quickening and illuminating Word which He employed is also given them; and this always has in it and exerts the same enlightening power, whoever may be its bearer.

“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the Word of this salvation sent.” Acts 13:26.

And those who receive it, receive at the same time the commission to spread it abroad for the benefit of others, who shall also be partakers of the life and the light which it conveys. The Word is the Lord’s chosen means of accomplishing His will and doing His work, and it always exerts this saving power, whether He speaks it in His own person or through the agency of His disciples. It is the same Word of God, which is quick and powerful, and

of course has the same authority and efficacy. Therefore the light of the world shines and vivifies wherever the Gospel of our Savior's grace and truth is proclaimed, though the minister who proclaims it be in himself weak and powerless.

“As Thou hast sent Me into the world,” (says the Son of God,) “even so have I sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on Me through their Word.” John 17:18-20.

Their Word is the same which the Savior speaks and therefore communicates the same life and light, and works the same saving faith. The Light of the world enlightens believers by His Word, and these again become the light of the world to enlighten others by the same quick and powerful Word.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe.” 1 Thess. 2:13.

Christians thus have the heavenly grace and the high calling to shine as lights in the world.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house.”

Although the faith which makes us Christians is in its nature as a spiritual treasure of the heart, into which no human eye can see, invisible to men, and although the kingdom of God, which is the company of believers throughout the world, is constituted by the faith which is invisible and therefore in its essence not an object of sight, yet in the calling which all be-

lievers have to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us from darkness to His marvelous light, they become manifest by letting their light shine. Faith works by love, and therefore, faith without works is dead. Every true Christian believer is a servant of the Lord to do His will, and as this will is principally that men should be saved and God be glorified, which is done by publishing the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, the company of believers is like a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden from the surrounding country. Those who do nothing to make the unsearchable riches of Christ known will soon be themselves impoverished. A living church will show its faith by its works; a church that shows no signs of life in the effort, however feeble and faulty this may be, to fulfill the high calling of Christ's followers, is dead. The light which fails to shine has gone out. Even infidels, though they know nothing of the spiritual treasures which true believers possess in their hearts, must recognize the Church in its external manifestation as a presence and a power on earth. By the work which the Lord has given it to do and His blessing upon it, who is Himself present always with His power, it occupies a conspicuous position in the world, and no one can live in a Christian land or acquaint himself with the world's history without seeing it as a city set on a hill.

It is not reasonable that a candle should be lighted and then placed under a bushel to conceal it, instead of being put on a candlestick to give light to the house. Christians can offer no rational excuse for the indolence which disgraces many an individual and many a congregation that professes adherence to the Redeemer's cause and to be entitled to a place among those whom He honors by saying, "Ye are the light of the world." Surely He has not endowed us with heavenly light, and capacitated us to give light to others, for the purpose of bearing the name of disciples, without the deeds which give that name a meaning in the community; surely He has not called us to make pretenses which we do nothing to substantiate and make good. He wants no drones and no hypocrites; and when He calls us as lights, and endues us with power from on high to be what He designates us, His blessing cannot remain upon us if we wantonly bury our gifts and neglect our vocation. When He makes us lights, it is that our light may shine. Refusing to do this is the sure way to sink back into the darkness from which the Light of the world desired to deliver us.

Therefore the admonition is given us:

“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

In view of human infirmity, even in those who are sincere in their desire to fulfill their heavenly calling, it is a necessary admonition. At best ours is a feeble service of the Lord that bought us that we might be His and live under Him in His kingdom, henceforth not living unto ourselves; the Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. But if we neglect the Holy Spirit's exhortations and motions in our hearts, how shamefully ungrateful and dangerously thoughtless our conduct is, must be apparent. If we will not heed the admonition which the loving care of our Lord for the souls which He purchased with His blood has given, the consequences will be our own eternal loss.

It is perhaps not necessary, in view of the oft-repeated inculcation of humility, to mention that the command to, let our light shine before men does not mean that Christians should make a public display of their efforts and achievements for the advancement of Christ's kingdom and make a boast of their success in accomplishing our Heavenly Father's will. The lowliness of mind which characterizes the sincerely penitent believer forbids the thought of doing our good works as much as possible in the sight of men and impressing them as good and great on the minds of the people; and the instruction expressly given to shun the ways of the hypocrites, who do their alms before men to be seen of them, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and corners of the streets that they may be seen of men, and who disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast, make it evident that all alleged good works done to attract public attention and solicit people's praise, are not in accordance with our Heavenly Father's will, and all glowing accounts of them in public for the purpose of acquiring glory for those who perform" them, is vainglorious vaunting that defeats the divine purpose of our high calling. There is glory in doing the work which God has assigned; to us as a manifestation of the Light of the world; but Christians have ample means of knowing that this glory belongs to Him

“...who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.”
Col. 1:12, 13.

The glory of the good which we do is not ours, and all human activity whose aim is to secure honor before men is by that very purpose vitiated and by its selfishness rendered unworthy of honor.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

But this conflicts not in the least with the command: Let your light shine before men. That is necessary to fulfill the high calling which Christ has given believers on earth. They would not be faithful, if they were not zealous of good works to execute the Master’s will; they would not be lights if they did not shine. But it is not their own glory that the Lord teaches them to seek and that the Spirit in their hearts moves them to seek. Our light is to shine before men, so to shine that they may see our good works, our testimony before the world thus being made clear and effective; but it is that men “may see your god works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Not our glory, who of ourselves are nothing and without Christ can do nothing, but the glory of the Lord, who is all in all, must be our aim, and to this all our efforts must be directed. We have a high calling to fulfill, and must not be idlers. Our light must shine, but not to win human applause. All praise belongs to God alone.

“Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” Col. 3:17.

“Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

No doubt our Lord, when He admonishes us to let our light shine before men, has chiefly in mind the Gospel of His grace, by which He lets His light of salvation shine in our hearts and by the promulgation of which His disciples shine as the light of the world. The principal good work that we are to do on earth is to bear the good tidings of salvation to all people, and thus rescue from the ruin which sin has wrought as many as may be led to receive the world's Savior. Of the things that men are called to do on earth this is the chief, that they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess Him before the world. If this is not done, though riches and honors and pleasures have been multiplied, efforts are put forth in vain, labor has been lost and life is a failure.

“Then said they unto Him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent” John 6:28, 29.

It is unquestionably true that faith is the gift of God and that it is accordingly the work of God in the believer.

“Faith Cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”
Rom. 10:17.

But that is not what our Lord, in answer to the question as to what we shall do to work the works of God, designed to inculcate and impress on our minds. What we shall do is to believe in the Savior sent us, that we may be delivered from the wrath to come. That is our chief work, without which all others would be of no eternal account.

“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.” Matt. 16:26.

Everything is lost if the soul is lost; and believing in Jesus is the only way in which the soul can be saved. That must therefore ever remain the chief thing to be done, without which all emphasizing of other works as supremely important is only a manifestation of human blindness and folly.

“Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the Gospel.” Mark 1:14, 15.

This was the great commission given to His disciples:

“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:15, 16.

This is not only the import and purpose of all Christ’s preaching, but of all Scripture as well.

“These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name.” John 20:31.

Manifestly the great work which by the power of the Holy Spirit we are to do in the world is to believe in Christ unto the saving of our sinful souls, then let the light which we have received shine for the enlightenment of others who sit in the darkness out of which we have been called. The work of God that we are to do is to believe in the Savior and confess Him before men. This is our high calling, and our great work is its fulfillment. It is vain to speak of doing the will of the Lord when we neither believe in Christ ourselves nor exert our powers to lead our fellowmen to such faith, through which alone sinners can be saved. Let your light shine before men to their salvation and the Savior’s glory. Then you will live to some purpose in the world and His blessing will be upon you in time and in eternity.

Of course during our sojourn in this world of sin and consequent woe the love by which faith works will find much to do for the alleviation of suffering and ministration of comfort, besides attending to the immediate duties of our temporal vocation, to which, in the order of God's providence, is so intimately related the reception of our daily bread. In all these things we should let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Sin has brought disorder and suffering that appeal for relief and wrongs that cry to be righted. We meet them everywhere along our path, even if our circumstances be so favorable that we never see the worst. The poor we have always with us and the afflicted and forsaken and helpless are found in every community. Opportunities for the exercise of that mercy which the grace of our Savior creates in believing hearts are never wanting. And Christians are always ready to embrace them. The Lord has made them lights in the world; and if some shine but dimly and some are so negligent in supplying themselves with oil that their lamps go out and they finally lose their way in the darkness, there is always a goodly number that is zealous in good works and faithfully serve the Maker in ministering to the needy and observing all things whatsoever He has commanded them. The entire history of the Church is a bright record of their deeds of love and their institutions of mercy. They who are themselves believers and thus lights of the world, have the command and the motive to let their light shine also in their works of charity; for "this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." 1 John 4:21.

When the grace and truth of the Lord have brought souls into fellowship with Him and led them to appreciate the great salvation with which He has blessed them, so that they engage cordially in the proper work of His kingdom, which is the saving of the soul, they will not be negligent of the subsidiary work of counteracting and so far as possible overcoming the temporal results of sin in suffering humanity by labors of love. In all directions and every sphere of life they will be ready to let their light shine before men, that the good will of God may be done and His name may be praised.

Readers who are desirous of knowing the mind of Christ and doing His will are not likely to overlook the design of letting our light shine before men. This is of course not to win their applause and to secure the honor for ourselves which belongs to God.

“Unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.” Eph. 3:20, 21.

The glory of every good work belongs to God only, for He is the fountain of all good, the source of every blessing.

“Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.” Jas. 1:17.

Therefore our Lord commands us to let our light shine before men with the distinct purpose “that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven.” There are many works done which the world calls good, but which are far from accomplishing this good purpose. Men become the light of the world only when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us into harmony with Himself, so that our will freely conforms to His good will, so that we live in Him and are directed by His will as revealed in His Word.

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Gal. 2:20.

No work can be good if the doer is not in accord with Him. It is the very essence of sin to put one’s self in the place of God and live unto self. To the natural man it will seem unreasonable to say that a work is not good, though it confers a benefit, because it is not done in the Savior’s name and does not give the glory to God. It cannot be otherwise, because the natural man re-

ceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. But the Christian believer walks in the light and sees why his good works must be recognized as fruits of his faith, that our Father which is in heaven may have the glory of them. Mere imitations of their fruits, in external acts without the spiritual life which honors God, count for nothing. Such imitations are not only possible, but they are plentiful; and where the chief work of those who are the light of the world is not recognized as that of believing in Christ and laboring by the employment of the means of grace to have others believe in Him, they are likely to abound even among Christians. The reason is not far to seek. We are fallen creatures and sin has blinded us. But we were created in the image of God, and the design of our Creator, that we should live in righteousness and true holiness, remains the same notwithstanding the fall. God still holds us to that creative design; for He has not changed, though we have turned away from Him and lost the most precious endowment of our nature. And in our nature there is still a reminiscence of the lost image in the power called conscience, to which the divine law makes its appeal and in virtue of which the divine will is felt to be eternally binding. Thus we are moral beings who feel their moral responsibility, but who are not at rest, because the righteousness and true holiness, in which and for which we were created, are lacking. We are held to the right, but we have gone wrong. There is no help for us in this moral wreck but in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world, who bids us come to Him that we may find rest for our souls. Conscience rebukes our sin but it cannot change our sinful hearts. That in this forlorn condition reason should strive to relieve the soul's unrest by endeavors to do the right and the good as it is able to see it in the darkness that is upon us, is natural. Hence come the humanitarian schemes and forces which so abound in the world and hence the multitudinous imitations, in external deeds, of the good works which are the fruits of the Spirit. They are efforts of nature to seem good and thus at once to quiet conscience and secure the applause of men. With those who are the light of the world all things have become new. They are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. Only thus can we be the light of the world and obey the mandate: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Our glorying is not good if we boast of our high prerogatives as the children of God, but forget our high calling and remain at ease in Zion. The

kingdom of Christ is waging an unceasing warfare against sin and Satan, with all their soul-destroying deceitfulness and malice, and is engaged in persistent work to overcome the darkness and death which they have brought into the world and are exerting all their energies to perpetuate. The children of the kingdom have the mission to let their light shine into this darkness and to rescue from this death the suffering souls for whom Christ died. And He is present with them every day, cheering them on to fight the good fight of faith and to labor while it is day under His mighty leadership, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. He has promised them the victory, and they have nothing to fear while He abides with them, which shall be until the end of the world.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He should destroy the works of the devil,” John 3:8.

They are safe against His wiles and His power, if they will only trust the Master and go forth in His name to the war and the work. “These things have I spoken unto you,” He tells us, “that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,” John 10:33. Shall we be content with a mere nominal membership in His kingdom and hide our light under a bushel, while gross darkness still covers millions and the little flock of our Savior is grieved at our faint-heartedness and lazy self-indulgence? Remember your high calling and the blessings which its fulfillment brings to men, and let the Master’s gracious promise encourage you:

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,”
Rev. 2:11.

4. The Better Righteousness. Matthew 5:17-20.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT presented to the people, whose only education centered in the Mosaic law, a strange doctrine. Was all that education, continued through centuries, to go for nothing? The long period of preparation for the advent of the promised Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom of righteousness and salvation, was now reaching its end. The substance had come and the shadows were passing away. The people had heard the voice crying in the wilderness: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” and Jesus went about all Galilee, “teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.” What was spoken by the prophet was fulfilled:

“The people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up,”
Matt. 4:16.

Some believed, but many were bewildered, and many were enraged against Him who so openly and so sharply rebuked the sins not only of the rabble, but of the very men who were honored as the religious leaders and teachers of the Jewish people. Would this man, so lowly in His bearing but so unsparing in His utterance, who claimed to be the Son of God and the long-expected King who should sit upon David’s throne, overthrow all the venerated institutions of Moses and introduce a new religion of which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob knew nothing? Would He establish a kingdom, totally different from that which was promised to their fathers and which should make Israel great among the nations? They needed instruction concerning these things, and the great Teacher was among them to give them light.

1. The Promises

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill, 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.”

They should be assured that the Son of God did not come to set aside the promises given through the prophets of old and recorded in the Old Testament, and to abrogate the thoughts of peace made known to the fathers from the beginning. The Gospel announced in Paradise immediately after the fall, and continued with ever increasing clearness by the types and ceremonies and prophecies of the old dispensation, were all designed to prepare the way for the coming of the Savior and the inauguration of His kingdom of grace and peace on earth, and could not be ignored or slighted. The positive declaration is then made that the very purpose of His coming is to fulfill the design of all God’s institutions and ordinances and promises, not to destroy them. Finally the assurance is given that the law shall stand while heaven and earth endure.

It may be helpful to the reader, for the better understanding of our Lord’s statements regarding the law, to remind him of some instruction given on the subject in other places of Holy Scripture. The law is a revelation of God’s holiness to man, requiring him to be holy in heart and life as his Maker and sovereign Lord is holy. The violation of that holy law is sin. This is rebellion against God, and a proud and presumptuous assertion of human independence, which is of necessity an abomination to God, whom it attempts to dethrone, and brings a curse upon the guilty, whose wicked self-will cannot be permitted to triumph over the Maker and Ruler of the universe. It was not unkind, and least of all was it unjust, to make such righteous demands upon a creature that was made in righteousness and designed for happiness under the universal reign of righteousness. Man rebelled and became the enemy of God by wicked works, and the Creator’s holy government could be maintained only by visiting upon rebellion its inevitable consequences. The wages of sin is death. Losing his original holiness and blessedness and lying under condemnation in his lost estate, the

being so highly endowed and designed for so noble a career, became incapable of fulfilling his mission or regaining his high position, and in his helplessness no prospect of relief from his misery appeared.

“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Rom. 7:24.

The holy will of God of course remained the same when man became unholy and wretched and spiritually impotent. The law, in obedience to which he might have remained holy and happy as God had created him, cannot help him now. It condemns him as a transgressor, the wages of whose sin it declares to be death. In the nature of things it cannot save him, though the foolish thought enters the heart of millions, that if they would only make up their minds to abandon their evil ways and obey the law of holiness by a holy life, all would yet be well and they would be happy again.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil,” Jer. 13:23.

They are dead in sin, and cannot restore themselves to life again and put away their iniquity and the curse which it has brought upon them. The law is good and holy, but it cannot make them good and holy. It condemns them for their sin, it cannot save from its own condemnation. Think not that Christ has come to destroy the law or the prophets. He brings us salvation, but not in the way which self-righteous souls suppose. He assures us, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” Scripture usage leaves no room for doubt that by the words “law or prophets” the entire economy revealed in the Old Testament is meant.

“The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it,” Luke 16:16.

All that God had done and made known for man's deliverance from the bondage of corruption is embraced in the law and the prophets down to the time of the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness. In Acts 13:15, the reading of the law and the prophets as the Scriptures used in the synagogues is mentioned, and in Rom. 3:21, St. Paul says: "The righteousness of God without the law is manifest, being witnessed by the law and the prophets," which evidently means that the entire Scriptures bear such witness. So when our Savior lays down a general rule of moral conduct, He declares this to be the law and the prophets, Matt. 7:12; and again when He sets forth the fundamental law of love to God and our neighbors and declares that "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets," Matt. 22:4, it is beyond question that the two words are intended to embrace all that is written for our learning in the books of Holy Scripture.

This revelation of God's thoughts of peace for the government and salvation of our fallen race Christ came to fulfill, not to destroy. His mission was to execute the plan of God and fulfill all righteousness. This included all law and prophecy of every description, types and shadows, civil and ceremonial regulations, precepts and promises, as God had given them for the education of His chosen people and their preparation for the Messiah's advent. All the express declarations concerning the coming of the Savior and all the prefigurations designed to represent and keep alive the promises respecting Him and His redeeming work were fulfilled in Him as the chosen One in whom they all centered. As the very Christ He could not otherwise than say to His Father:

"I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do," John 17:14.

But it is the law given by Moses which is here especially had in view. This is apparent from the explanations subsequently given. The moral law summarized in the decalogue is paramount, but the so-called ceremonial is neither expressly excepted nor is there any ground for regarding it as an exception, unless the difficulty which its inclusion presents to some minds should be esteemed a sufficient ground. Fault was found most frequently with our Lord's teaching and conduct in regard to the ceremonial ordinances which the Jews so highly prized. Was not the charge against Him true, as far as

these were concerned, that He destroyed the law, and could He rightly say that in this respect, as in every other. He came not to destroy, but to fulfill? He undeniably did teach otherwise than the scribes and Pharisees concerning the import and purpose of the Mosaic ritual, and His treatment of their observances was certainly not such as they desired or expected. His doctrine of the divine law as a revelation from God directed to the hearts of men and requiring an inward conformity with His will in righteousness and true holiness, necessarily involved the assignment of the external deed to a subordinate place in the fulfillment; and when this external observance was held to be the fulfillment itself, as it was by the Jewish teachers, Christ could not otherwise, in accordance with the divine intent of the law, than condemn the consequent work-righteousness and rebuke the shallow morality that looked only at outward appearances. This He did both in regard to the moral and the ceremonial law, because in both the scribes and Pharisees had emptied the law of its divine meaning, and by their fundamentally false teaching and practice erected a barrier to the establishment of His kingdom of grace and truth.

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here, or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:20, 21.

That which is seen is not the essential thing, though it might have the highest semblance of holiness and elicit the applause of the best of men. It may after all be merely a glittering imitation of works that are done in righteousness, without an inner reality to give it moral substance and truth. “The righteous God trieth the heart and reins.” Ps. 7:9. Men may deceive their fellow-men, but they cannot deceive God, who seeth the heart and judgeth righteous judgment. When the Pharisees set up the external act as the measure of righteousness, they deceived themselves as well as those whom they should have taught better. Their error vitiated the moral as well as the ceremonial law.

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth,” (says our Lord,) “and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Matt. 15:8, 9.

Never is it anything but the commandments of men when external works, whether moral precepts or ceremonial ordinances are the subject, are inculcated as the fulfillment of God’s will, which is that we should be good trees of the Lord’s planting, which will then bear good fruit for the Lord’s glory. In regard to ritual observances this is plainly indicated when the apostle says:

“The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Rom. 14:17.

They are all astray who imagine that keeping the Mosaic ordinances in regard to different kinds of food consists simply in abstaining from the bodily eating of meats pronounced unclean or refraining from forbidden work on sabbath days. But it must not be overlooked that the principle thus laid down applies equally to the requirements of the moral law. They are guilty of the same error who imagine that when they have refrained from the outward act of murder or adultery they have fulfilled the commandments which forbid these sins. Our Lord shows that both in regard to the moral and the ceremonial law His adversaries are the destroyers of the law which He came to fulfill.

We are not endeavoring to push out of sight the manifest difference between the law of righteousness and the ceremonial ordinances, and the bearing which that difference has on the subject under consideration. The difference is recognized and the difficulty which it seems to involve is not ignored. The ceremonial law was a means to an end which was temporal. When that end was attained it had fulfilled its purpose and was of no further service. In its nature it was temporary; when its work was done it ceased to be obligatory. And while it continued in force, the obligatoriness was based entirely on the end to be accomplished, not on the inherent righteousness of the ceremonial observance. The moral law is in its nature of perpetual obli-

gation and value, because it is the revelation of the holiness of God as the rule of life for man made in His image and for His glory. It is therefore eternal, and can never cease to be binding on the creature made to be holy and happy only in the fulfillment of the mission which God gave and His law regulates. The law of meats and sabbaths and purifications and sacrifices could pass away without affecting the soul's relation to God and the life of holiness; the law of love to God and man could not be abrogated without undermining the divine government and destroying all foundations of human righteousness and wellbeing. Did not our Lord in fact destroy the ceremonial law instead of fulfilling it, and thus give the Pharisees occasion for their bitter accusations against Him, though they utterly failed to find in Him even any appearance of sin against the moral law? So at a superficial glance it might seem. The ceremonial law is no longer in force since the kingdom of God has come. It is a dangerous error to maintain that this kingdom is meat and drink. The delusion that certain acts or omissions constitute a good title to citizenship in that kingdom with all its privileges and blessings, has blighted the eternal prospects of many a soul.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ.”
Col. 2:16.

The laws in regard to these things have passed away, while the moral law has not. No ambassador of God could be authorized to say. Let no man judge you in respect of lying or stealing, of murder or adultery, because the law still stands that condemns them. In itself it is no sin to eat pork; in itself it is a sin to take the name of the Lord our God in vain. The law of the ten commandments cannot cease to be binding, for it is the legal expression of God's holiness which is eternal; the ceremonial law is no longer in force, because its whole purpose and meaning were fulfilled when Christ came. He came to fulfill the ceremonial as well as the moral law. That the fulfillment did not in both cases take the same form, but in each case corresponded to the nature of the law and the design of the Lawgiver, should be thought a matter of course, not a perplexing disparity.

That which our Savior rebuked in the Pharisees was not their strictness in the observance of divinely prescribed ritual laws, as if that must necessarily be mere formalism. All the laws of God are given to be obeyed, and no man has a right to set any of them aside as useless. They must be fulfilled, that the will of God may be done. The Pharisaic fault lay in failing to fulfill them, and this with regard to all the divine laws alike. They made mere ceremonial observances of the moral law by regarding the prescribed outward act as the obedience required; and the ceremonial laws with their design of foreshadowing the coming and the kingdom of Christ, in whom all the law and the prophets were fulfilled, they did not understand, but supposed their purpose was attained when the ceremony was performed, as they did in regard to the deeds of the moral law. That with such a system of work-righteousness in external performances they should delight in multiplying their human ordinances for outward show of sanctity was natural, and no wonder that they brought the railing accusation against our Lord that He was destroying the law and the prophets when He rebuked their legality and formalism.

Christ came to fulfill, not to destroy what God had revealed in the olden time and had written in the Old Testament. This was the necessary condition of setting up and maintaining His kingdom on earth. All the will of God, as it had been made known from the beginning must be accomplished, for it all pertained to the great salvation proclaimed in that kingdom. Promises and precepts alike looked to the realization of this divine will, and now, when the promised Savior came, the kingdom of God was at hand and all things were ready for the crowning work of divine mercy to fallen man.

“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27.

All the prophecies that gave hope to the people of the old covenant, foretelling the wonderful birth of the Son of God in this world of sin, His life of obedience for the fulfillment of all righteousness, His labors and sufferings and death for the deliverance of condemned sinners, were fulfilled in every particular. All the religious institutions with their numerous ordinances and extended ritual foreshadowing the coming redemption through the Savior’s

sacrifice upon the cross, attained their end in Him. Nothing was destroyed, everything was fulfilled. Not even the ceremonial law, which was a shadow that faded away when Christ the foreshadowed body appeared, was abrogated as a useless imposition of lifeless forms: it, too, was fulfilled in all the fulness of its divine purpose, and ceased to be of any further service only because that purpose was fully accomplished. The prescribed observances “are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ.” Col. 2:17.

But it is the moral law whose requirements and fulfillment Christ makes especially prominent in His sermon.

“Lo I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God.” Heb. 10:7.

Christ’s obedience to the law was perfect. No sin could be laid to His charge. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Heb. 4:15. But the fulfillment required something more than activity in doing the good deeds commanded. Not only is perfect holiness of heart required, which the Pharisees notwithstanding all their boast of the law failed to comprehend, but there are dreadful penalties attached to its transgression, and these, too, must be borne before any fulfillment can be claimed. Looking to these there were sacrifices ordained in the old dispensation. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, because the wages of sin is death. These sacrifices prefigured the great sacrifice which in the fulness of time was to be offered upon the cross, in which all was fulfilled.

“Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein, which are offered by the law, then said He, Lo I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first that he may establish the second. By the which will we are all sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Heb. 10:8-10.

Christ died for us, taking our sins upon Himself and paying their penalty, which the blood of bulls and goats foreshadowing this could not do, so that

we might escape the death which is our due as the wages of sin.

“When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5.

All is now fulfilled; therefore our Lord could send forth the gracious call:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Matt. 11:28.

2. The Law Shall Stand Forever

“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.”

The scribes and Pharisees are warned that the law of righteousness shall stand forever. So far is Christ from destroying it, that He impresses it in all its divine force and fulfills it in all its divine fulness. But He therefore continues to rebuke their perversions, that they may learn to understand it and honor it as they should and profit by it through the entrance of its light into their benighted hearts. In their perversity, which led to numerous ordinances of their own invention, they were accustomed to make distinctions as to the dignity and value of the commandments, holding some to be greater and others of inferior importance; and naturally they gave the preference to their own conceptions of what is meant or implied, as that was laid down in their ordinances and traditions. Thus they asked Jesus:

“Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But He answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your traditions?” Matt. 15:2, 3.

By their arbitrary regulations, born of their work-righteous spirit, they set, the law of God aside to make room for the shallow morality of their own carnal minds. An example is given in connection with the answer to their captious question just cited, Christ there continues:

“God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother, and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say. Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother. It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”

In other words, they taught that what we are commanded to apply in gratitude to the support and comfort of our parents may, under the pretense of devoting it to God, be withheld from them without sin, thus rendering the divine law nugatory by a human contrivance. Such ordinances of their own fabrication they were wont to regard as the great commandments. Hence Christ says: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,” which there was no divine command to tithe, “and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith,” Matt. 23:23. To this our Lord refers when He speaks of breaking one of the least of these commandments and teaching men so. As the Pharisees declared the law of God to be of less worth than their traditions, Christ pronounces sentence upon them as the least in the kingdom of heaven, which indicates that they are as little entitled to a place there as their traditions. On the other hand, he who observes God’s commandments and teaches the people to stand in awe of His Word and obey His will, shall be great in His kingdom, being found a faithful servant of the great King who saves them by His grace and richly rewards their fidelity.

It is not only because those who were the teachers of the law were chiefly had in view, that the teaching as well as the doing of God's will is mentioned. Doing the commandments is obeying the will of Him who gave them, and breaking them is disregarding that holy will and disowning its authority. Teaching otherwise than the law declares enhances the sin of disobedience and is doubly damnable, because it not only leads away from God, but blocks the way of returning to Him. False teaching is but too frequently represented as a light offense compared with living and doing otherwise than the Word of God requires. The vicious thinking of our materialistic times, which assumes all to be well if we only do what seems to us right, no matter what we believe, undermines all moral as well as religious foundations; for it not only eschews all regulatives divinely revealed to secure right conduct, but it prevents the introduction of the power of the Gospel for the creation of a right faith and a renewal of the lieart for the guidance of the will in ways of holiness. When the teachers lead the people to regard that to be right and good which, though it may seem right in their own eyes, is plainly a violation of the law of the Lord, not only is iniquity condoned and encouraged, but the only remedy for it is rejected and men are left helpless in their sin. As long as the Word of God is taught, transgressions are condemned and their consequences are warned against. Evil-doers may thus be brought to see their sin and be led to repent and amend their ways. But when sinners are misled by ungodly teaching and suppose that their violation of God's commandments is not sinful, they have nothing left to show them their error, and wrong triumphs permanently, the very light which should lead them to the better way being put out and every avenue to betterment being closed. Teaching otherwise than the Scriptures teach is the sin that sanctions sin and by deceiving the people silences even the voice of conscience. Thus it at once leads to error and renders its correction impossible.

3. The Law Requires Righteousness

“For 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 law which our Savior came to fulfill requires righteousness. This the scribes and Pharisees did not deny or ignore. They knew it. But the righteousness which they taught and practiced was not that which was required. They erred, and erred fundamentally. They erred in regard to the nature of the righteousness which the law demands, and they erred fatally in regard to Christ's fulfillment. A better righteousness than theirs is indispensable in the kingdom of heaven.

That better righteousness, in the first place, is the spiritual fulfillment of the law as a spiritual commandment. In this the Pharisees were utterly found wanting. The spiritual import of the law they did not perceive nor teach nor practice. They lacked the spirituality which is necessary to make this possible. Of them and their kind it is written:

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me,” Matt. 15:8.

That is the way of all formalists, who find obedience to the will of God to consist in outward conformity to rules which He prescribes. It is the natural disposition of man, so far as his thoughts are occupied at all with the high subject of our relation and our duty to God. He has become carnal, which is the opposite of spiritual.

“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good,” Rom. 7:12.

With this the human soul originally corresponded, and would correspond now if it were holy and just and good. But sin has come and corrupted it. Because of this the natural man is unholy and unjust and wicked, and knows no way of complying with the holy law, whose requirements his own conscience sanctions, but that of performing the acts prescribed. The result is the works of the law, which he of course pronounces good, although he is not good and therefore inwardly not in accord with the laws.

He thinks them good because the act squares with the demand, and beyond this he does not look and has not the ability to see. He deceives himself when he takes the good appearance for the good substance and imagines himself a good man because he does some works that are supposed to be good.

“For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin,” Rom. 7:14.

This the scribes and Pharisees could not understand in their spiritual blindness. Hence while they inculcated and did what they presumed to be the law of God, their hearts were far from God and their obedience accordingly only a vain show. This they regarded as the righteousness which the law requires and of which they made their sanctimonious boast. It was such a righteousness as any heathen may claim when he gives a hungry tramp a piece of bread or refrains from kicking him when he repays the kindness with insult. Their righteousness was that of works, a large portion of which was not even such as the divine law demanded, but was rather additions and perversions of their own devising; and that which corresponded to the holy law was only a sham obedience in external performances with which, so far as they were deeds that seemed to be the proper expression of the holiness required, their hearts were not in harmony. It is the work-righteousness in which so many heathens, and so many who do not want to be heathens, still in our own times put their trust, and by which multitudes who even call themselves Christians and have access to the light which Christ brought into the world's darkness, deceive themselves. Unless our righteousness be better than that, we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord's fulfillment of the law recognized its spiritual nature and significance, and His disciples are taught to recognize it, that they may be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

It is not a new law which Christ gives. The better righteousness needed for entrance into the kingdom of God, is something more than the law or any human obedience can furnish. This must be noted in the second place, as the essential element in His fulfillment of the law. As against the Phari-
saic perversions He gives a lucid exposition of the old law, which He made known as the revelation of His holy will for the guidance of His people

from the beginning, which He implanted in man's nature when he was created in the image of God, which was sanctioned by the human conscience, notwithstanding the fall, through all the ages of his earthly history, and which was written on tables of stone and delivered to Israel on Mt. Sinai that it might still be read when sin had rendered the writing in the heart almost illegible. This law was sufficient for its purpose. Indeed it is perfect, and therefore incapable of any improvement. No new Lawgiver was needed, and Christ did not come to make additions to that which was already perfect and required perfect holiness in obedience. But it was necessary that the law should be understood, that it might do the preparatory work for entrance into the kingdom of grace and glory which the Savior established. But the object of His coming was to save the people from their sins and set up that kingdom. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Something more than instruction was necessary to revive the mass that Satan had slain. Life must be breathed into the dry bones. This our Savior provided. And this was in accord with the eternal purpose and plan of God for the rescue of our ruined race. Man was no longer spiritual, and no enlightenment concerning the original spiritual import of the law would bring about its fulfillment by a spiritually dead people. But God had thoughts of peace towards His forlorn creature and made gracious provisions for his deliverance from death.

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which My covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After these days, saith the Lord, I will put My law into their inward parts and write it on their hearts, and will be their God and they shall be My people." Jer. 31:31-33.

Those days had come when the Savior appeared. Instead of the outward form of obedience to the righteous demands of the law, which was all that man in his spiritual death could render and which the scribes and Pharisees

supposed to be all that is needed for righteousness. He gave them the life and the light which brings into the soul deliverance from the bondage of sin and delight in God's holy will, so that the liberated people would serve the Lord with gladness according to His Word. He gave them His Holy Spirit, so that the law was put in their inward parts and written in their hearts, and they delighted to do the Lord's will. That is the better righteousness, of God's regenerated people who are endowed with new hearts that beat in unison with our Heavenly Father's holy will, and who live under Christ in His kingdom of grace on earth as children of God who daily rejoice in the hope of glory. That is the better righteousness of the renewed and sanctified heart, of which the work-righteousness of the Pharisees, ancient and modern, is but a spurious imitation.

But that is not all that need be said to set this better righteousness in the clear light of Holy Scripture. Even the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, who is given us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not insure a complete fulfillment of the law and thus supply the perfect righteousness which is requisite in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord's fulfillment of the law, not our own, is after all the only sure foundation of our Christian hope.

Reflecting Christian readers will no doubt raise the question, whether the great salvation which our Lord effected and proclaimed, and which is the great treasure possessed and dispensed in His kingdom, is attained by this better righteousness of the law. An affirmative answer would mean that righteousness is indeed by the law, but it is not the righteousness of the mere external conformity of our works with the demand which the law makes, but that of the inward harmony of our hearts with the Lord's holy will. That seems plausible. What more could be required of us than that we should be holy as our Maker is holy. And more is not required of us in the Scriptures. The question then resolves itself into this, whether the salvation which Christ proclaims is anything more than our obedience to the divine law, and whether Christ is our Savior in any other sense than that He enables us to render such obedience. The natural man will reply in the negative. With him it stands to reason, so far as sin and salvation are topics challenging consideration at all, that the sinner must abandon his sin and do right if he would escape its punishment, and that so far as Christ has anything to do with the case, it can only be as a great teacher showing us the way of amendment and as a great example of right living. The error is fatal, and is none the less so because millions fall into it. Among these there are

many who not only profess to be Christians, but whose sincerity and general integrity and honesty is unimpeachable. This makes the error still more reputable and captivating and to this extent more destructive. It seems ungracious to speak with earnestness and emphasis against a false doctrine that is so popular and the condemnation of which is offensive to so many who have the reputation of being good people, and the duty is made still more onerous by the persistent plea of the errorists, that we are making subtle distinctions in which the common people have no interest and which can have no purpose but to gratify a love of strife and a hatred of those who will not submit their thoughts to ours. But the subject is not one of hair-splitting theology or of personal preference in a domain of liberty. It pertains to the very essence of Christianity, on which the great battles of the ages have been fought against the work-righteousness which is everywhere in vogue and has been striving to undermine the Christian Church from the beginning. The gates of hell have not prevailed against her; that cannot be; but many souls have been destroyed by the error which virtually rejects Christ as the Savior of the world and wickedly represents man as his own savior. It therefore behooves us to show that by His fulfillment of the law and the prophets, not by ours, the righteousness of God is satisfied and sinners are saved from the condemnation which the righteous law of God pronounces upon them.

The sermon on the mount deals mainly with the exposition of the law, without entering in detail upon its purpose in the plan of salvation, or upon the relation of Christ's fulfillment to the demands made upon us and the penalties to be inflicted in case of our failure to satisfy these demands. But the larger purpose of Christ's mission, as shown throughout the Scriptures, looms up when the particulars entering into its accomplishment are duly considered, and we cannot expect to have a clear understanding of the text before us without discovering its bearings upon the way of our salvation. It is assuredly not a needless or irrelevant inquiry, whether the better spiritual righteousness which our Lord taught as the requirement of the law and set in opposition to the carnal righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was fulfilled by those among them who were willing to hear and learn, or has been fulfilled by His disciples since, so that complete satisfaction has been rendered and all requirements have been met, and no charges lay against them that could interfere with their admission into the kingdom of glory. Let the reader who would flee from the wrath to come look into his own

soul. If he is a sincere believer in Christ as the Savior of the world, he has the Spirit of God in his heart and finds delight in doing God's will. But has he the perfect holiness which the holy law requires, and has he done all things which are commanded in that bond of perfectness which, in love without dissimulation, accords with the mind of Christ? And if he has not in all his life been without sin, but has been a child of wrath by nature and experienced the motions of sin stirring in his soul, has he satisfied the law by suffering the wages of sin, which is death? For the fulfillment of the law obviously implies these two things, first, that perfect obedience be rendered, in the heart and in the life, to all its holy demands, and secondly that, in case of failure in any respect to do all that is required, to suffer the death denounced upon transgression. All righteousness must be fulfilled; failure in anyone point subjects to the penalty.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10.

Men deceive themselves when they accept the lying flattery of Satan that they are perfectly holy as the law requires and that there is no taint of sin in their hearts, or in their thoughts or words or deeds. And this applies to Christians as well as to unbelievers. Indeed, it applies especially to them. The natural man may more readily imagine himself sinless, because in his superficial notions of sin and holiness he may imagine himself guiltless of all evil doing when even in the estimation of his neighbors he is a bad man. He thinks that because he has never been arrested as a criminal no one can accuse him of wrong, and therefore, like the Pharisee in the parable, he thanks God that he is not like the poor publican who confesses himself to be a sinner and implores mercy. The Christian believer has a better knowledge of sin and righteousness: for he has become a Christian only by repenting of his sin and believing the Gospel of forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. But he is not now without the taint of sin in his nature. The soul regenerated by the Spirit and planted into Christ, hates sin and loves righteousness. St. John even says:

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not: but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself and that wicked one toucheth him not.” 1 John 5:15.

It is a faithful saying, and true disciples of Jesus will not pass over it lightly. But neither will they disregard the other passages of Scripture which are necessary for the correct understanding of the complex life of God’s children.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us,” 1 John 1, 8-10.

The true believer wants no fellowship with sin, but daily walks with God and strives to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect; but he does not deceive himself with the flattering thought that his goal has been reached, and thus permit the enemy of his soul to lead him, in carnal pride and security, to boast of his own righteousness, “not as though I had already attained,” says St. Paul,

“...neither were already perfect; but I follow after, if I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” Phil. 3, 12-14.

If the Spirit of God dwell in us, we are moved by that Spirit not to live after the flesh, but to crucify it and refuse consent to any of its motions, and to walk in holiness by the light of His Word and the power of His grace.

“Now, if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”
Rom. 8, 9.

The condition of the Christian then is this, that the Spirit of Christ that is given him through faith, renews him after the image of God that created him. so that he no longer has the will to sin, but follows after holiness, whereunto he is called. But the flesh, or the old Adamic nature which he has inherited, still clings to him while he lives in the body and prompts to all manner of evil.

“This I say then. Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Gal. 5, 16, 17.

And so it comes that the believer in Christ, though the Spirit given him renounces the will of the flesh and brings forth fruits of holiness, still finds the old nature asserting itself and striving to gain the mastery, thus admonishing to constant vigilance and prayer. He thus leads a life of daily repentance for the sin that so easily besets him and daily rejoices in the forgiveness of sin which the Gospel brings and his faith embraces. He neither grows proud of his ideal sinlessness in Christ nor despairs on account of his real sinfulness in himself.

“The good that I would I do not. but the evil that I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” Rom. 7:19-23.

To the carnal mind it might seem illogical to impute the sinfulness of the flesh to the regenerated person who is spiritual and contends against the sin; but to the child of God all difficulties in this regard vanish when it is considered that the personality is one and that the flesh against which the Spirit strives is his flesh. The Christian's sanctification is real, but always imperfect during his pilgrimage on earth, until the change come and the victory of grace is won over the sin in our nature.

The better spiritual righteousness which Christ inculcates as the original purpose and meaning of the law can therefore not secure our salvation as our fulfillment of the law and our righteousness. We now know that it is spiritual and requires something more than our works to fulfill it; but we also know that we are carnal and therefore are not in perfect harmony with it in our hearts as it requires us to be. We cannot fulfill all true righteousness, and we cannot make satisfaction for our transgressions. The law therefore condemns us to eternal death, and we have no power to deliver ourselves from the body of this death. We cannot save ourselves, and therefore in His boundless love the Son of God came to save us. He is our Savior.

“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested; being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,” Rom. 3:21-24.

That sums up the whole gracious plan of man's deliverance from the curse of sin. Christ came to fulfill all for us; our fulfillment will not avail. He is our Savior, for He secured a perfect righteousness by doing all and suffering all that the law demands, and this He did for us. This is the perfect righteousness which the Gospel offers and which faith embraces. It is the better righteousness, which consists in the perfect fulfillment of the will of God, so that every demand which God makes upon man is fully satisfied. But it is our Savior's fulfillment and His satisfaction, not our own, and the glory is His, not ours.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Eph. 2:9, 10.

It is therefore a perversion of our Lord’s teaching when His exposition of the law and His demand of a better righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees is represented as a doctrine of justification by the deeds of the law. He does teach that the law is good and should be obeyed, and He came not to destroy, but to fulfill it. What He rebuked in the Pharisees was never their inculcation of good works according to the law, but their corruption of the law and their shallow notions of good works, which defeated its holy purpose. Nor did He ever intimate that good works are not necessary. On the contrary, He taught the importance of them as required by the will of God, only antagonizing the Pharisaic perversions which eliminated the will of God and rendered their pretended good works a cheat. In His kingdom the true holiness which the law requires has its appropriate place. In this He provides by His grace, through the gift of the Spirit, for a devout life of obedience to the will of God, such as nature cannot render.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them,” Eph. 2:10.

But never did He speak a word that could justify the belief that salvation is secured by these good works. He came to fulfill all the law and the prophets in our stead and in our behalf as our Savior. He thus acquired a perfect righteousness for us, which we might appropriate by faith unto our salvation. This is the righteousness of God by faith, which is our only hope. His fulfillment, not ours, satisfies the righteousness of God, and that fulfillment is set down to our account when we believe the Gospel which offers it for our acceptance.

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:27, 28.

5. The Law Illustrated. Matthew 5:21-37.

AFTER SHOWING that the Pharisaic interpretation of the law was so superficial as to undermine it, and that the commandments of men were foisted in as a substitute, and, in opposition to this perversion, setting forth its true meaning as the revelation of God's holy will requiring holiness of men, Christ illustrates His teaching by various examples. It may be necessary to remind some readers that our Lord's explication of the law is directed against the false literalism and manifest perversion of the Pharisees, not against the law itself as given by Moses. Those certainly err who assume that the law was imperfect and that Christ perfected it by making additions and amplifications, as if that which was lacking in the Jewish apprehension of its meaning had been lacking in its original import. It never was designed to be a mere rule of outward action, without regard to the hearts of the persons acting. To the Jewish people who sinned, it was said in the days of Moses:

“The Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as He rejoiced over thy fathers, if thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the Lord with all thine heart and all thy soul.” Deut. 30:9, 10.

It was addressed to the heart from the beginning, as Christ referred it to the heart. It always meant that men should be holy, for the Lord our God is holy. Nothing can be lacking in its requirement in that respect.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of God is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Ps. 19:7, 8.

When our Lord showed the Pharisees their delinquencies, it was not by making demands upon them which the venerable law of Moses did not make. He simply inculcated what that holy law required, and made manifest their shortcomings and transgressions in doctrine and practice as measured by that divine rule. He was not the giver of a new law which should supplant the old. The old was perfect, and what He desired was that they should hear and learn and understand it, and, seeing their sin, should be brought by His grace to a better righteousness than that which they had conceived and of which they were making their puerile boast. He had indeed a work to do in regard to the law, to which He was obedient unto death; and He was engaged in that work when He made clear the meaning of the law and applied it for the accomplishment of its divine purpose. He it was to whom the words of Moses referred when he said to the Israelites:

“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto Him ye shall hearken.” Deut. 18:15.

He came not to destroy, but to fulfill the law, that by His grace we might receive as a free gift the salvation which under the law we could not attain.

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:3, 4.

Christ's fulfillment of the law was in our stead, that His righteousness might be imparted to us through faith, and that in consequence of this vicarious fulfillment we might receive His Spirit to lead us in the way of holiness which He walked and which the law sets forth.

This law of holiness is summed up in the great commandment that we should love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and the second, which is like unto it, that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Christ recognized this as the true meaning of the law, and thus declared it to be perfect, when He said to the lawyer tempting Him. "This do, and thou shalt live." Luke 10:25-28. If anyone did this, and thus were perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, nothing else would be needed to obtain eternal life. To understand our Lord's exposition of the law, His summary of its fundamental meaning, and its primary purpose to work in us a knowledge of our sin and our need of a Savior, must be kept in mind.

1. Thou Shalt Not Kill

The exposition begins with the fifth commandment:

"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."

No fault is found with this. But when the Pharisees understood it to mean simply the external act of destroying the life of a fellow man, they missed the mind of God entirely. He deals with persons, not merely with their outward actions, and requires these persons, not only their actions, to be right and good. Hence our Lord continues:

"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 does not set His saying in opposition to the commandment in the decalogue nor to the penalty attached by Jewish laws to its transgression. But He does declare that the Pharisaic system of externalism and work-righteousness overlooked the most important matter of the divine law, which requires personal obedience in harmony with its holy intent, and that the transgression is first in the heart of man before it becomes an outward act. This inward transgression, whether it becomes manifest in external action or not, is sin, and merits the punishment due to the transgressor. Not only the sinful act is condemned by the law. That condemnation is terrible, but it would be comparatively lenient if it did not extend to the persons who perform it. It is upon these that the penalty falls.

“Unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil,” Rom. 2:8, 9.

The superficiality which contemplates the law as nothing more than a prescribed form of good works in the outward conduct, and can therefore see guilt only in external actions as the eye discerns them, makes void the law in its spiritual import, and thus practically destroys it. Our Savior came to fulfill it, and to this end first rescues it from carnal perversions and sets forth its true import and meaning.

It was in pursuance of their shallow conception of righteousness and their system of meritorious deeds in conformity with prescribed rules of conduct that Jewish teachers distinguished certain degrees of guilt attaching to violations of the law, and various corresponding penalties. To such degrees our Lord refers when He says that not only the literal murderer shall be in danger of the judgment, as the rabbis maintain, but that one who is angry with his brother shall be exposed to such danger, while giving utterance to the inward malice, in words of reproach and condemnation, such as “Raca,” or worthless fellow, “Thou fool,” or ungodly person, shall be in danger of the higher court or of hell fire. Of course the design is not to teach that the wages of sin can in any case be other than death, and distinctions of guilt and penalty are not made or accepted with such an implication; but our Lord would have His hearers understand, that the sin against the commandment is committed when murderous thoughts and feelings are harbored

against a brother, and that before corresponding deeds are done with tongue or hand the person is guilty of death. This being accepted, account may properly be made of differences according to our Lord's words:

“That servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” Luke 12:47-48.

The error of the self-righteous Pharisees lay not in the recognition of this rule, but in making a distinction between the laws of God, as if some were more holy than others, and the violation of some were therefore less worthy of punishment than that of others. They did not recognize the eternal banishment from the presence of God as due to all sin, and the degrees of punishment as pertaining to that state of perdition, and in this proportioned to the degree of personal wickedness attaching to the sin, but thought that the eternal death which is the wages of sin might be escaped because of the lesser guilt that would subject to fewer stripes. It is the same error into which many Christians suffer themselves to be enticed when they imagine that, though they may not have the faith which alone can save, their good works will be rewarded in heaven, and that, though they remain in unbelief and thus cannot enter into the kingdom of God, they shall escape the damnation of hell because their sins are not of that glaring and crying sort that would subject them to many stripes. Whatever difference may be made, sin is the transgression of God's law, and the wages of sin is death, from which only the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world can release us.

As regards the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” our Lord mentions three degrees; beginning with anger, as the murderous affection of the heart that may at any moment break out in the murderous external act of killing, proceeding next to the expression of this in words of disdain, and ending in the vilification which is murder with the tongue, not mentioning the actual destruction of life which even a Pharisee could perceive to be a violation of the commandment. “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” What the Jews regarded as the just

penalty of murder, our Lord pronounces due to anger. It is the stirring of the evil lust within, which, when it has conceived, brings forth sin in the external act. Not all anger, not anger of every description is meant, but anger without a just cause. Even if the words “without a cause,” which is not found in some manuscripts, were not in the text, the connection and the analogy of faith would show that this is meant. For anger is not always sinful. “God is angry with the wicked every day,” Ps. 7:11. Our Savior, in dealing with His unreasonable and persistent enemies, “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts,” Mark 3:5. St. Paul implies that Christians may be stirred to anger by the unrighteousness of men without sinning, when he says:

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil,” Eph. 4:26, 27.

We cannot love the right and the good without hating the wrong and the bad. But we must see to it that our anger at wickedness does not, by nursing it in a heart that is not perfectly purified, become a motive of our flesh; and hence the admonition not to harbor it against offenders and by the instigation of Satan permit it to become embittered and enraged, to the exclusion of the love which we owe to our enemies. That is the carnal anger that is murderous, that is forbidden in the fifth commandment, and that puts us in danger of the judgment. It is the loveless and unreasonable anger of the flesh, that impels to wrong-doing in word and work, as it is itself a condition of the heart that is sin because in conflict with love.

“Now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth,” Col. 3:8.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts when grace has renewed us, so that the ill will which is begotten of the flesh cannot be allowed to make its abode there.

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him,” 1 John 3:15.

When we become angry, and permit the sun to go down upon our wrath, the affection runs to evil, and sinful acts result. “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Hence our Lord points out two other forms of murder, which are both utterances by means of words, though in two degrees of unkindness and uncharitableness, and both effects of that anger and wrath that are murder in the evil heart. Saying to a brother Raca, means to denounce him as a good-for-nothing, with whom it is best to have nothing to do. The man who does this augments the sin of his heart by giving vent to its anger, and thus enhancing his guilt puts himself in danger of the council or a higher court with a prospect of heavier punishment. “But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.” The name indicates more than a trifling idler, of whom it would be useless to expect any good. It means a wicked person, from whom only harm can be expected, and the angry application of the term to a brother is therefore a vilification that destroys his good name.

“If any man among you seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain,” James 1:26.

The fifth commandment is violated every day by the lovelessness of our hearts and our words, though we may never have laid hands on anyone to inflict a bodily injury.

After explaining the commandment our Lord adds some important instructions in cases where it has been violated, giving directions both to those who have done and those who have suffered wrong.

“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. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst 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.”

The Christian will not let the sun go down upon his wrath and by hating his brother become a murderer. If he is aware that between him and a brother there is a barrier that stands in the way of that cordiality which should exist between brethren, he will be moved by the Spirit of Christ that is in him, not only to cast out the uncharitableness as the obstacle in his own soul, but also to remove whatever obstacle to a complete reconciliation there may be in his brother. The Church has paid good heed to the Lord’s instruction and applied it especially in her communion practice, requiring communicants to have peace among themselves, and such as have aught against a brother to be reconciled before approaching the sacrament of the altar. An unconciliatory disposition is a bar to loving fellowship with brethren, as it is a bar to loving communion with God, and is rightly regarded as constituting unworthiness to commune with the Savior in the Holy Supper. The attempts of the guilty to excuse or justify their fault by setting aside the law of love, and appealing to what seems to them a sense of justice, cannot avail before the Church, as it cannot avail before God. To say that if your brother hath aught against you, it is his duty to come to you and tell you your fault, is quite correct. So the Lord wills and so He has commanded:

“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” Matt. 18:15.

This must be done, and he sins who refuses to do it. But a reconciliation must take place, or brotherly fellowship must cease. If therefore thou rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee the necessary reconcilia-

tion, which is of course obligatory on both, has not taken place. If he has not come to you and told you your fault, he has not done his duty; but this does not excuse you from doing yours. There is still hope of a reconciliation if you will go to him. And if he has come to you and failed to remove the barrier between you, all the more reason is there that you should now go to him and try to remove it. The duty to be reconciled lies upon both, and each must do what he can to effect the reconciliation.

The possibility is recognized that when all that is required towards effecting it is done, the object is not attained. Some souls are not conciliatory and all the efforts of love to bring about harmony may fail.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Rom. 12:18.

Sometimes it does not lie in us and is not possible.

“I am for peace, but when I speak they are for war.” Ps. 120:7.

Either the offender or the offended may prove stubborn and refractory. Among brethren in the Church this must lead to separation. The unreconciled parties cannot commune together in spite of their dissension. The fellowship must cease when the heart persists in its grudge and will not be reconciled. Hence our Lord has given further instructions for church discipline, commanding that, if the trespassing brother is not gained by private interviews, he shall be admonished in the presence of witnesses, and if this prove ineffectual, to

“Tell it unto the church; but if he will not hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” Matt. 18:15-18.

In the sermon before us Christ sets forth the process under the image of a court, in which the person unreconciled with his adversary is represented as subject to imprisonment until the difficulty is settled. The obvious meaning

of this is that if men continue to harbor murder in their hearts, they will die in their sin and forever perish under the condemnation of the law; for only those who repent and believe the Gospel can escape the curse.

2. Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery

The second illustration which the sermon gives is that of the sixth commandment.

“Ye have heard that it was said of 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.”

God’s ordinance from the beginning was that, as He created mankind male and female, the latter being a helpmeet for the former, the man and wife should live together as one flesh; and “God blessed them, and God said unto them. Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.” Gen. 1:28. This is the divine plan for the propagation of the species; and all the acts of man, outside of this ordinance of marriage, tending to this propagation by the use of the organs created for this purpose, are violations of the divine purpose and abuses of the divine gift. One man and one woman shall be joined as husband and wife and “they twain shall be one flesh.” The blessing of God upon this union is the birth of children. Only in this relation is this birth legitimate. Cohabitation of the sexes aside from this marriage relation, in which one man and one woman pledge fidelity to each other, is forbidden, and specially the cohabitation of man or wife with others than their spouse, is the sin of adultery.

The sexual organs and their use must be restricted to the divine purpose as made known to us by our Maker, and the intelligent creature, if he would stand in communion with God and enjoy its blessedness in time and eternity, must observe the divine order prescribed for the attainment of the divine purpose. Adultery counteracts and defeats that purpose by violating that order. It is the prostitution of powers given for the service of God, to the gratification of carnal lust. The sinfulness of it was acknowledged by

the Jewish people, and Christ had no need to inform them that it was justly prohibited and punished. But there was need, as in the case of the fifth commandment, to impress upon their minds the fact, that the law contemplated more than the prohibition of such acts of prostitution, and there is need to impress this upon our minds and those of all people. The will of God has always been:

“My son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.”
Prov. 23:20.

This the Jewish teachers generally disregarded, and this even Christian people too often disregard now. Therefore our Lord sets forth the deeper spiritual import of the commandment:

“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

That is the truth that we must learn, both that the law may do its work of showing us our sin and thus preparing us to repent and believe the Gospel, and of showing us the way of holiness, and thus pointing out how believers ought to walk and please God. There is no ascetic suggestion in the Savior’s words. He does not say that looking on a woman, the admiration of whose beauty may be as innocent as the admiration of beauty in other forms of nature, or in art, is a sin; but looking on a woman to lust after, is adultery, and is therefore condemned as sin by the divine law, which requires holiness. It is adultery in the heart, which God sees and judges, and which therefore does not need to become manifest in the outward act before it can be subject to the condemnation of God’s law. We are not truly penitent as long as we refuse to acknowledge the sinfulness of the heart with its evil lust; and we do not walk after the mind of Christ in true faith as long as we are indifferent to the motions of sin within us, as if the law denounced penalties only on sinful acts, not sinful persons. Therefore:

“...fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness nor foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient.” Eph. 3:3, 4.

“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Gal. 5:24.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” Col. 3:5, 6.

The sermon refers to the necessity of self-denial and self-crucifixion, which is inculcated in the cited apostolic words, when it goes on to say:

“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 that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Our Lord makes His meaning plain by using a comparison. If an eye be diseased and threatens to destroy life, or a hand be crippled and menaces the poisoning of the whole body, the way of wisdom is to pluck out or cut off the menacing member, rather than to sacrifice the whole body and lose the life, with which all would be lost. So if the lust arises within us and presses for gratification, it must be resisted with all the power of the grace given us, though the conflict be painful and the victory over sin be attainable only by a sacrifice comparable to that of losing an eye or a hand to save the bodily life. That is what the apostle Paul means when he applies the terms mortify and crucify to the treatment of the carnal propensities in our nature. The

evil lust, the sinful concupiscence must not be condoned. Excusing them as unavoidable, justifying them as natural, pleading for their toleration as infirmities which are birth-marks, for which we have no remedy, are only wiles of the devil to keep us in the chains of sin. The remedy is the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. Trying to better our corrupt nature by syrups of reason and sense is a vain expedient. The cancer must be eradicated. And that hurts. Repent and believe the Gospel, and having thus entered into the kingdom of God by faith in Christ's fulfillment of the whole law in our stead, and received the Spirit of adoption as children of God who are free from the bondage and the curse of the law; you will tolerate no sin, but will fight it unto the death, not taking the conflict with it easy, but crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, and yet all the while retaining the peace of God which comes by believing that the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin. Our Lord would have us to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin, that we might come to Him and find rest for our souls in the great salvation which He has wrought for us by His vicarious fulfillment of the law, and there in companionship with Him fight the good fight of faith against the world and the flesh and the devil. We may thus receive many a wound and bear many a scar in the battle, but can always rejoice in the hope of glory through the victory which He has won. Pluck out the eye and cut off the hand that would keep you in the bondage of sin and Satan and separate you from our blessed Lord in whom alone is salvation.

In connection with the sixth commandment the subject of divorce is introduced, because one of the forms of its violation is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.

“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 commiteth adultery.”

The Jewish teachers made divorces easy; in opposition to their laxity and levity our Lord declares that there is but one cause for divorce, and that is fornication, which is becoming one flesh with another than the wife or hus-

band whom God has joined together for life. It is the one sin which breaks the tie that binds the twain together.

While the sin against this commandment, like every other, has its seat in the corrupt heart and the commandment is frequently violated by married persons as well as by others, divorce can refer only to acts that become known. Like marriage it is so far of a public character that those who lawfully live together as man and wife must be recognized as such in the community, and when the marital relations and the restrictions which it imposes are to cease, the same public recognition of the divorce is necessary. As a matter essentially of a civil character, the civil government must necessarily deal with marriage and divorce, and is of course confined in such dealing to the external acts. The two lawfully married to each other remain man and wife until death, unless the bond is broken by adultery; and when they are ostensibly divorced on other grounds, either commits adultery by marrying another, because in God's sight the two are still joined together, and neither is free to marry another. Christians can of course be bound in conscience only by the Word of God, and can therefore not recognize every marriage and divorce which has the sanction of the state under whose laws they live, although they will obey these laws so far as it does not require them to do what the Scriptures forbid. They must obey God rather than men, and patiently bear the consequences of such religious fidelity. But the difficulty in this regard is not as great as it seems to some persons, for the state has no authority and no ability to regulate our hearts, and has no purpose to interfere with our convictions or sentiments, as long as our actions do not conflict with its laws. In lands of enlightenment full liberty is accorded even to express convictions in opposition to established laws and strive by argument and persuasion to effect their amendment. A minister of the Church is not required to solemnize a marriage or to recognize a divorce which the Word of God forbids, though the laws of the land sanction it. The civil government authorizes him to act in the premises, but does not command him to act, and can charge no disloyalty if he declines to act when his conscience bids him decline. Questions of casuistry may arise from this source in the administration of the Church's discipline, but they are not as numerous as is frequently supposed, and the difficulties attending them are not insurmountable. At any rate the principle must be upheld at whatever cost, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. Of more importance for the daily life of Christians is the divine instruction to keep our hearts

pure by the grace of our Savior, and “fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and each love and honor his spouse.”

3. Thou Shalt Not Take The Name Of The Lord Thy God In Vain

In further illustration of the spiritual meaning of the law the Savior turns to the second commandment:

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.”

The subject selected for particular exposition under this head is that of the oath. It appears that the Pharisees, in pursuance of their work-righteous principle, which was fundamentally false because it lacked all spiritual insight into the holy will of God and the holy purpose of the law, thought the law fulfilled if only they did not break an oath in which God was called to witness, supposing that oaths by other objects were of no consequence and their violation would not be imputed as sins. The Mosaic law says:

“Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God.” Lev. 19:12.

It seems that this suggested to their sophistical minds two evasions of the divine meaning: first, that false swearing must not be by the name of God, which would be punishable; second, that false swearing by any other name would not be reprehensible, because what is forbidden is to “profane the name of thy God.” “Woe unto you,” Christ says,

“...ye blind guides, which say. Whosoever shall swear by the temple it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar it is nothing, but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind, for whether is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?” Matt. 23:16-19.

Over against such puerilities the Lord says:

“Again ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths; 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. But let your conversation be. Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

This suggests the inquiry in the first place, whether our Lord designs His prohibition of swearing merely in opposition to the Pharisaic perversion and thus to restrict its meaning, though there is no restriction in the expression, merely to the errors of which mention is made. The meaning would then be that not swearing in general is forbidden, but only that kind of swearing which the Jewish teachers regarded allowable, because the object by which the oath was made was not the sacred name of God, and the keeping of which was therefore not presumed to be obligatory. The prohibition would thus embrace all trivial, frivolous and superfluous oaths, while all oaths by the name of God that seemed to be necessary to maintain the truth and to promote the glory of God, and that were taken for our neighbor’s welfare or by order of the civil government, are exempt. We are not able to accept this as the intended sense of our Lord’s words; for, first, the prohibition is general, and no intimation is given that it is meant only in a limited sense; secondly, it would not make clear wherein the Pharisees erred in regard to

swearing and performing their oaths by the name of God; and, thirdly, it would not agree with the warning, that what in our communication goes beyond a simple yea and nay cometh of evil. The interpretation is therefore arbitrary. Acceptable as the sense thus attached to the words is in itself, it cannot justly be regarded as the meaning intended.

In the second place we are led to inquire whether the words are designed to declare all oaths in their nature sinful, and therefore to be absolutely rejected by the disciples of Christ. Some Christian sects have so understood our Lord. But this, too, we must regard as erroneous. The oath cannot be in itself irreligious or immoral, else it would not have the divine sanction which the Scriptures give it. Not only is it commanded,

“Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve Him and swear by His name,” Deut. 6:13,

but even God Himself is represented as employing it, “for when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater He swore by Himself.” Heb. 6:13. The oath involves no profanity in its appeal to God, but serves a good purpose when it is rightly used.

“For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.” Heb. 6:16.17.

Therefore those cannot be right who regard the oath as in its nature involving a superstition and an impiety, and on this ground condemned by our Lord and forbidden under every form and under all circumstances.

But the prohibition is given in plain words, and Christians must reverently let it stand as it reads, all the more assured that when they do this they have not mistaken its meaning, because it is repeated by St. James 5:12:

“Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath, but let your yea be yea and your nay, nay, lest ye fall into condemnation.”

The injunction is the same as that given by our Lord in the sermon, and the ground on which it is based is the same: for our communication with each other our affirmation by saying yes, and our negation by saying no, is enough; whatever goes beyond this comes of evil and subjects us to condemnation.

But what is the evil and whence the danger? The royal law of love points the way for understanding the subject. In the kingdom of God, where the Holy Spirit has purified the heart by faith, brethren must trust each other. One must not suspect the other of untruthfulness. The brother does wrong to his brother when he requires more than a yea for a yea or a nay for a nay. It cometh of uncharitableness. In charity a brother must accept a brother's declaration as truthful and must require no oath. Neither must he think the evil in his heart that his brother suspects him of lying, and therefore confirm his assertion by calling God to witness. The brotherly relation has been impeached when such suspicions are permitted to influence our actions and the one sinning against love has fallen into condemnation. In the Church, among Christian brethren, there must therefore be no swearing. The relation of brethren in faith and love is disturbed as soon as untruthfulness is even insinuated. In the kingdom of God which Christ established and in the interest of which His sermon on the mount was preached as well as all His other work was done, the rule must be invariably applied: “Swear not at all.” For the children of God in their relation to each other and their communication with one another, the oath is entirely prohibited, because the conditions in the kingdom of God are such that any resort to it would imply the absence of that love which there must rule supreme, and the admittance of that temper of evil which has no confidence in the work of grace. Among the children of God oaths could only come of evil because implying a want of confidence in each other.

But that is manifestly not all that is necessary for the elucidation of the subject, which is complicated by the continued dwelling of the children of God in the world that lieth in wickedness, and their continued duties and consequent communications in this world. They live and labor among peo-

ple who are not children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The law of love which regulates their lives does not dominate the world. They are not of the world and the kingdom of God, in which they live with their conversation in heaven, is not of this world. But they are in it and have their work to do in it. When therefore they deal with people of the world they do not forget their principle of faith working by love, but they do not expect that the world which knoweth not the Savior will, in the selfishness of its wickedness, recognize their principle and act accordingly. That would be a foolish expectation, because the natural mind cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. The more the people of the world look into the human heart, the more they distrust it.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jer. 17:9.

Hence when the men of the world require an oath to make their neighbor's assertions credible, this is quite natural; and as they know nothing of the grace of regeneration, which recognizes all lying and deception as an abomination, no complaint can be made if they require an oath to make men's asseverations trustworthy. That is natural and reasonable. Nor can Christians complain if they are treated like other people. If a Christian brother asks me to take an oath in confirmation of my word, he insults me by his distrust and sins against the law of love; if a worldling asks the same thing, his conduct gives me no offense, because he judges all men on the basis of corrupt human nature and knows nothing of the power of grace that makes men truthful and eliminates falsehood: I can therefore expect nothing better of him.

There is therefore no just ground for condemning the taking of an oath absolutely and for refusing to take it under any circumstances. It is an erring conscience that renders some Christians painfully scrupulous in this regard. Only if there were that in the nature of an oath that makes it inherently sinful, as we have seen that there is not, could there be any sound reason for such scruples when the civil government imposes the oath, or when the circumstances indicate that the cause of truth and righteousness could be promoted by taking it. Certainly we would misunderstand our Lord's words if we regarded them as condemning what God Himself did and under some

circumstances commanded to be done and commended. But that furnishes no apology for the vicious and God-defying profanity which is so much practiced among the people and which is so shocking not only to Christians, but to all men and women of any refinement. Profane swearing is so vulgar and so vile that it affects the ears as foul stench affects the nostrils, and so vicious and so demoralizing that even civil governments have found it necessary to issue laws against it. Christians look upon it with abhorrence for the higher reason that it is a bold and seemingly defiant violation of the second commandment, which has not even the poor excuse of securing some temporal profit by the disgusting sin. The rule with Christian people in their daily conversation must be "Swear not at all," avoiding the trivial oaths which are so common as the supposed rhetorical ornaments of speech among the vulgar, as well as the shocking blasphemies of the ungodly degenerates. In the kingdom of God, among Christian people, where the law of love is the acknowledged rule of life, there will be no occasion for oaths. There yea is yea and nay is nay, and what is said is meant, and whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil; but in the state, whose regulations are based on natural right as reason teaches it, and which can make no distinction between Christian citizens and others, there should be no fear that wrong is done when Christians comply with its requirements, and thus by an oath for confirmation make an end of all strife. Heb. 6:16.

6. The Bond of Perfectness. Matthew 5.38-48.

THE LAW OF LOVE which our Savior inculcates, is universal. It is designed to control the lives of all men, and to exert its benign influence upon all people. None are exempt from the obligation which it imposes, and none are to be excluded from the benefits which its fulfillment confers. Enemies are no exception. They exist because sin, with all its nefarious selfishness, has entered into the world and despoiled the fairest creature in it of the image of God in which he was made, and in which he was loving and happy. Man fell, and his love and happiness were lost; but the obligation to righteousness and true holiness in love remained.

This love is by no means a mere disposition to render kindness for kindness, and thus in a commercial and mercenary spirit repay favors with favors, and confer benefits with a view of receiving like benefits in return, but a cordial good will towards all and a sincere desire to make all happy. That affection which excludes an enemy from its benevolent operation could not be love. What love is, God the Father shows us in the mission of His Son to save us, and the Son of God shows us in dying for our sins, and the Holy Spirit shows us in the grace offered sinners, that they may enjoy the blessings which Christ's great atoning work has secured for all men.

“God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Rom. 5:8.

When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another.” 1 John 4:10, 11.

This is the import of the law as its Author declares it, and this is the love that is to reign in the hearts of men renewed after the image of God by faith in the Redeemer.

“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Rom. 5:6.

As God loves us, so ought we, who by creation were formed and by regeneration are renewed after His image, to love Him and one another. This is the purport of all the commandments. Therefore St. Paul, after giving various exhortations, adds:

“Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” Col. 3:14.

The portion of the sermon which we have now reached inculcates this heavenly love, which is restricted by no earthly considerations, and is therefore due to enemies as well as to friends. The section treats first of our duty to those who show their selfishness in special acts of ill-will, V. 38-42; secondly, of the application of the law to enemies in general, 5:43-47; and thirdly, of the fundamental requirement of perfection, in which all divine laws are of necessity embraced.

I. Those Who Do Special Acts Of Ill-Will

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

These are difficult lessons which the Maker gives us. The wisdom of this world stumbles at them, and pronounces them wild and impracticable. Carnal reason, when it lacks the courage to reject them outright as the effusions of a flighty dreamer, insists that they must be taken with great allowance and sanely interpreted before any thought can be entertained of accepting them as a rule of conduct in the world as we find it. Christians, who stand in awe of God’s Word, cannot consent to any such summary process, by which the revelation given us from heaven is rendered of none effect. They will be ready rationally to look into the subject and welcome all efforts to find a legitimate interpretation of the words, but consent to no departure from their obvious meaning, whatever difficulties they may present in practice.

1. The Divine Ideal

It must be observed, in the first place, that our Lord expounds the law in its true spiritual import, as a revelation of God’s holiness and righteousness that should be a pattern for the intelligent creature made in His image and designed for His companionship in holiness and righteousness. It sets forth the divine ideal, which is to be realized in human life. That thus a life of activity in good works is required is obvious. But more than this is demanded. The principal thing is the right condition of the heart, as the personal source whence that activity is to proceed. Not only the deeds are to be conformed to the rule prescribed, but the person who performs them is to be holy as God is holy. Only thus can the deeds, which as mere actions are morally indifferent, be made holy. Good fruits are the product of a good tree. Men should be like God, who is love, and therefore like God in deeds of love, ever eschewing evil and doing good, because that is in accord with the na-

ture and calling which God has given him. Love is the fulfilling of the holy law, because it is the soul's conformity to God's holy nature, of which the law is a revelation. This love must permeate the life and regulate and pervade all activity, so that every motive and every motion is holy as is the source whence they proceed. It is love that is required, not the mere verbal profession of it, and not the mere semblance of it in deeds that are called charity, but the disposition of the heart which is devoted to God and kindly affectioned towards man, and whose works therefore are in reality works of love, emanations of the love which glows in the heart. Where such love without dissimulation reigns, doing good to all will be a delight, and the thought of retaliating when wrong is suffered will not be tolerated. Should not the child of God, in the spirit of love, be willing not only patiently to bear the wrongs suffered, but suffer them doubly rather than violate the law of love? If it be said in reply that nobody has such love and that the whole matter is only a fancy, let us keep in mind that Christ is not showing how all the people of His kingdom live, but how they ought to live. And if it be further urged that there can be no use in setting forth an ideal which is rarely, if ever attained on earth, our answer is that it is of the utmost importance for the souls of men, both as regards doctrine and practice, that they should know what the will of God is, even our sanctification, and that they should see how far they come short of it, in order that they may live a life of daily sorrow and repentance on account of their sin and of daily self-crucifixion and watchfulness and prayer in striving after holiness; and this not with the thought that such living will make good their shortcoming and open the doors of heaven to them notwithstanding their sin, but that they may by faith cling more closely to their Savior, who is their only refuge and hope, and whose Gospel alone can give them peace. Many a soul is lost by embracing the Satanic delusion that God will not hold us strictly to His law, seeing that in our depraved and disabled condition it is impossible to fulfill it. The effect of such lying solace on unnumbered souls is that they grow indifferent about the life of holiness which the law requires and see no need for the consolation of the Gospel, which can be embraced only by those who experience the terrors of a sin-stricken conscience and recognize the needed deliverance in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He came to fulfill the law for us in all its fullness and severity, not to destroy it or relax it, and the children of God, after they have experienced its salutary use in bringing them to a knowledge of their sin and thus of

serving as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, will let it stand as their ideal of holiness in their glad endeavors to show forth the praises of their Savior. Abide in Him by faith unto eternal life, and moved and guided by His Spirit you will thankfully walk in the way of holiness; and while this holiness can contribute nothing to your salvation, which is by grace alone, and you will all the while seek it because you desire it and it pleases the Master, you will live after the Spirit and mortify the deeds of the body, that you may abide in Jesus and sin may not cause your death.

2. The Spiritual Importance

When the sermon on the mount was delivered the audience was composed of people who respected the Mosaic law and recognized its authority. But their teachers had failed to understand its profound spiritual import and sadly misinterpreted it. Christ explains its true meaning, as the Jews needed such explanation that the light of heaven might shine into the earthly darkness that obscured it. He did not come to set it aside or to disparage it, but to fulfill it in all its requirements, both as to the duties imposed and the penalties of transgression. Only when the law was misunderstood or perverted could the Pharisees offer any plausible excuse for suspecting that He was not a friend of the legal economy under which they were living. That He rebuked their unspiritual ceremonialism and their self-righteous trust in the virtue and merit of external performances is evident; but He did this because it was based on ignorance or perversion of the law which they claimed to honor and which He found it necessary to explain. And so it was in regard to the application of confessedly divine precepts. The law of retaliation, to which the verses before us refer, was part of the Mosaic legislation.

“Thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe,” Ex. 21:23-25.

Christ does not charge upon the Jewish leaders that they had forged or falsified this law of Moses. What He condemns is their lack of love, which is

the fulfilling of the law, and their consequent misapplication to the private intercourse of individuals what was issued as an ordinance of civil government for the punishment of criminals. It is as if a man should claim the right to punish his neighbor for an alleged wrong because the law of the land ordains such punishment by the court when a person is tried and proved guilty of the crime. The assumption of the Pharisees was that the law of retaliation in kind, an eye for an eye, was meant to gratify the natural craving of the sinful heart to get even with an enemy and to avenge the wrong. Our Lord's exposition was not directed against the law. The Mosaic code itself forbade what it was falsely understood to teach,

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” Lev. 19:18.

That the civil government is authorized to do and must do for the public welfare what the private individual has no right to do, and can not do without public injury, lies in the nature of all civil organizations and their legislation. The enacting of laws for the government of a community would have no rational purpose without authority to enforce them. Justice cannot be upheld and order preserved without inflicting punishment on those who violate the law. And such persons are found in every community. There are always some who, while they are glad to enjoy the benefits of just and salutary laws, are not willing to obey them. Hence God has instituted governments with legislative and penal powers, that those who pursue their own will, in disregard of the equal rights of their fellow citizens, may be compelled to respect justice and observe order, and may suffer the merited punishment if they persist in wrongdoing. St. Paul writes:

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” Rom. 13:1, 2.

The authorities divinely commissioned to curb individual self-will and maintain public justice may rightfully do what private citizens could do only by usurping authority which they do not possess. The ruler acts in the name of Him who is Lord of all.

“He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil,” Rom. 13:4.

If this civil government then ordains that the penalty of violating the laws of the land shall be “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” it exercises a legitimate authority, and our Lord is far from setting Himself in opposition to powers which He, as the Son of God, has Himself instituted. His condemnation is pronounced upon the selfishness which takes the power of governing and punishing into its own hands, and thus rejects God and serves the devil.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,” Rom. 12:19.

God will attend to the punishment of evil-doers, and judge righteous judgment, which the wrath of man is not capable of doing; and for the temporary administration of justice in this temporal life, until the final judgment comes, He has provided “the powers that be” in the State.

3. The Bitterness of Malice

The bitterness of malice which Satan has introduced into the hearts of men has no kinship with the wrath of God against sin and the vengeance which He takes upon the stubbornness that persists in sin. His indignation and wrath is revealed against the ungodliness of men; vengeance is His, and He will repay; His minister in the civil government is a “revenger to execute

wrath upon him that doeth evil.” So Christ Himself used severe language against adversaries; and the apostles, after their Master’s example, condemned false doctrine and life with severity and without mincing words. This has been urged as proof that our Lord’s meaning in this portion of His sermon cannot be what His words import, or that He was Himself all astray in His conception of the righteousness which the law requires. We cannot but think that such cavilers are all astray in their criticisms. They do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. Even the natural reason of man leads him to make a distinction between the action of a civil court and the presumption of a private citizen, and to see the difference between executing the sentence of such a court and inflicting punishment by a person on his own individual account, according to his own private judgment. If a neighbor knocks out your eye, are you justified in knocking out his eye to get even with him? It is getting even with him in sin. Giving way to your wrath and taking vengeance on your own account, is the way to anarchy and social ruin and the subversion of all justice and order.

“The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,” James 1:20.

The Scriptures teach us to commit all things to Him, and cheerfully submit ourselves to His government; for He is just and wise and good, and doeth all things well. In Him is no malice and ill-will and injustice, and Christians can well trust in Him to make all right, although appearances are often such as to put their patience on trial. He is absolute Monarch, and vengeance is His, as well as blessing. On His dealings the regenerate heart has no criticisms to pass, and when He condemns and punishes His subjects for their disobedience and sins, it is unreasonable to appeal to His example in justification of our condemnation and punishment of our fellow men, who are not our subjects, but with whom we are equally subject to the One just judge of all men. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right, and shall we not, if we desire the right, commit all to Him?

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written. Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore 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. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”
Rom. 12:19-21.

4. To Exercise Love

Our Lord teaches us to exercise love to all men, not excepting our enemies. But the special instructions given in the verses under consideration seem still to suggest some difficulty and to require some further remark. In opposition to the error that any person has a right to retaliate when wrong is suffered, and thus to apply the rule of “an eye for an eye,” He teaches “That ye resist not evil.” This is not hard to understand. Instead of giving way to the selfishness and ill-will that tries to get even with an offender by giving him an equivalent, the disciples of Christ are to exercise love towards their neighbor even when he does wrong. The malice that foolishly seeks to right one wrong by balancing it with another, must have no place in hearts that have been purified by faith in the Redeemer, who in His infinite love has merited remission of sins for all men and graciously offers it to all by the Gospel. They should have pity on others as Christ had pity on them, and not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. To this the Spirit of God, who is given them when they become believers, steadily moves them. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His,” Rom. 8:9. Nor can a sincere Christian experience any difficulty in comprehending the principle which underlies the conduct required by our Lord’s sermon. So far must the disciple of Christ be from letting his carnal propensities gain the mastery over him and enslave him to sin, that he would rather bear double the wrong inflicted by his enemy than violate the law of love that reigns in Christ’s kingdom. Therefore if one

“...smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

The principle of love inculcated is plain, and no true disciple of the Savior can intelligently assume that more is required than the law of holiness, which God has bound upon man from the beginning, has always required. The difficulties arise only when the specifications applying the law to man's practice are considered in their relation to other requirements made by the law of righteousness as set forth in the Scriptures. If a ruffian strikes me in willful wickedness, or in conscious violation of all law takes away my property to gratify his greed or spite, or in bare malice to inflict an injury upon me, asks me to give or lend him my money or goods without any claim of suffering or need on his part, shall I understand Christ's words to mean that the love which the Holy Spirit has given me will find its appropriate expression in yielding to his satanic assaults and demands, and even doubling my loving compliance with his ungodly desires? I think not. The law of love was never designed to ignore and overthrow all righteousness, but rather to fulfill it; and our Lord's teaching was always directed to the inculcation of love and justice without bringing them into conflict. They are harmonized in the dreadful penalty laid upon our sin in the crucifixion of our Savior, and in the sacrifice which He offered that we might escape that penalty and receive life everlasting. And they need not conflict in the life of God's redeemed people. Several necessary distinctions may serve to make the subject clearer.

The first is that between the believers and the unbelievers, and the different treatment which love suggests to each. Our brethren in the fold of Christ have claims on us which the heathen man and the publican have not. We have mentioned the case of willfully wicked attempts of bad men to deprive us of the rights secured to us by divine and human law. When a person smites us, or takes away our coat, or would borrow of us, it is not clear from such act that he is a malicious murderer, or confirmed thief, or a wretched swindler, and it is not right to assume that he is. If he is a brother such an assumption could only be the result of uncharitableness in our hearts. The

principle of love which our Lord inculcates would prompt us to gain our brother, and rather bear this wrong doubly than let uncharitableness gain the ascendancy in our hearts. The Christian will not readily abandon the hope of gaining his offending brother and preventing the separation which sin persisted in would necessitate. Our Lord prescribes the course which love is required to take when He institutes the process of church discipline as recorded in Matt. 18:15-18. It is the application of love under the Lord's own directions in the Christian Church. If the wrong-doer is not a believer, the treatment which our Lord teaches His disciples to accord him will be different as the relation existing between them is different. It will not then follow, indeed, that the offender has necessarily done the wrong with malicious intent and consciously satanic spirit, so that turning to him the other cheek when he smites us on the one, and letting him take our cloak also when he deprives us of our coat, would not only imply a cowardly yielding to arrogant injustice, but would seem a sanctioning of the wrong and confirm the evil-doer in his wickedness. There are such brutish people in the world, but a man may be an offender without having sunk to the lowest depths of conscious sinning with malice aforethought; and deciding him to be such, with no other evidence than the fact that he has done us a wrong, is uncharitableness which the Christian shuns. When this becomes apparent, the conduct of the offender must have resisted all the Christian's efforts to win him by love, and will have turned these efforts of love toward protecting himself and his neighbors in their life and property by letting the civil government exercise its power to render him harmless by taking away the liberty which he abuses and visiting upon him the punishment which he deserves. But if the offender is not hardened in his wickedness, the disciple of Christ who suffers the offense, in the practice of the love which he owes to all men, and in the application of that wisdom which cometh down from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, is manifestly required to abstain from retaliation; yet, on the other hand, by the use of gentle words and kindly deeds, to endeavor to arouse his conscience and lead him to see the light which shines in the kingdom of God and to enjoy its blessings. No Christian should forget his high calling in this regard. To win men for the kingdom of God and His righteousness must ever be our purpose. In doing good to our enemy we shall heap coals of fire on his head and make him ashamed of the evil that he meant to do us, as the mercy of God leads us to repentance.

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,” Rom. 12:21.

5. Love Is Not A Condition Of Citizenship In God’s Kingdom

Our Lord does not teach that the attainment of this divine purpose in the life of the individual is the condition of citizenship in His kingdom, or of the accomplishment of the ultimate design of its establishment. No doubt errors in this regard have largely contributed to the frequent efforts made to moderate Christ’s interpretation of the law and to put upon this a more lax construction. Regarding it impossible to keep commandments that are so manifestly in opposition to all the propensities and powers of our human nature, and inferring that the acceptance of the words in their plain meaning would imply the impossibility of any soul’s salvation, and the consequent subversion of the entire divine plan, it seemed necessary to take them in a milder and more practicable sense. But this is only one of the many instances of the meddling of worldly wisdom with matters beyond its comprehension, and of the deplorable work that results. Salvation is not by the deeds of the law at all, and the Savior came because the curse of the law was upon us and there was no way of escape by human powers or human works.

“What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:3, 4.

Our Savior came with a precious Gospel of salvation by faith in Him and His atoning work, that “being justified by faith we might have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 5:1. Therefore all believers can joyfully say with St. Paul:

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16, 17.

The sermon on the mount is indeed an exposition of the law, which our Lord came to fulfill, not to destroy. He illustrated it in His life of perfect holiness and suffered its curse upon our sin by the vicarious death, which is the wages of our sin. This is the kernel of the Gospel which He preached, that by His active fulfillment of the holy law we sinners can be esteemed righteous in the court of heaven, and by His paying the penalty, in His vicarious death, of our failure to fulfill it, we can escape the death which we have merited; and that the way of realizing for ourselves all that He did and suffered for us is simply to appropriate it by the faith which the Holy Spirit works. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Nothing else is needed.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28.

The reason is obvious.

“He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4:25.

But all this does not render the law with our Lord’s exposition of its import needless for us. It still makes its demands upon men, denouncing “unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Rom. 2:8, 9. Christ has come to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, and rejoice in the

hope of glory in the mansions of our Father's house. But the message that comes to us now is,

“Repent and believe the Gospel.”

“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John 3:36.

Only when men see their sin and the curse that is on it, and on them because of it, can they be induced to flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Gal. 3:24.

And when we have come to Christ and found peace in believing, we still need the law to guide us in holiness, that we may know how to walk and please God. Not that now we should harbor the ungrateful thought that we can secure a righteousness of our own by our fulfillment of the law, and thus render the righteousness of Christ superfluous. That is the way to fall from grace and lose everything. But now, loving righteousness and ever striving to express our gratitude in loving service, we see that we are at best unprofitable servants, and cling all the more closely to Christ our Savior, that we may have daily pardon of our shortcomings and transgressions and daily peace in believing.

II. To Enemies in General

“Ye have heard that it hath been said. Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. 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; that ye may 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. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? 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?”

The principle of love as necessarily including enemies, is now stated more directly and more fully. We have seen that it underlies the directions given in the preceding verses, and now it is expressly set forth and enforced as love to enemies, that there may be no room for misunderstanding. The fact that a person is not merely suspected of being an enemy, but is known as such, does not exclude him from the operation and the benefits of the love which God requires us to have in our hearts and exercise in our lives.

The Pharisees exercised their ingenuity in trying to make it appear that enemies are not included when love to our fellow men is required. Their perversion, not the Mosaic law, was antagonized by our Lord. The law says:

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Lev. 19:18.

Making all due allowance for the special calling of the Israelites, and their consequent relations to the people occupying and surrounding the promised land, there was no ground in the duties imposed on them, nor in reason or right, for inferring that they might hate all others but their own people. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor,” can under no circumstances mean that thou shalt hate thine enemy. The contrary was required by the Mosaic law:

“If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.” Ex. 23:4.

Love was the requirement of the law in the Old Testament as well as in the New, and it always extended over all people, including enemies.

“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he stumbleth.”

“Say not, I will do to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.”

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.” Prov. 24:17-29; 25:21, 22.

In this, as in the other cases mentioned, Christ sets forth the true meaning of the divine law in opposition to the misapprehensions and perversions of Jewish teachers.

Instead of recompensing evil for evil, we are taught to overcome evil with good. Love must rule in the kingdom of God even when we are dealing with enemies. When they curse us, we must bless them, giving them good words for the evil which they have given us. When they hate us, instead of hating them in return, we must manifest love to them by doing them good. When they spitefully use us and persecute us, we must pray for them. There is a beautiful gradation in our Lord’s words of instruction. We should have love in our hearts as the foundation of a right conduct towards our enemies. This will fortify us against the sinful impulses of the flesh, which would prompt to render evil for evil, and will be an incentive to use gentle words and kindly deeds to overcome the evil; and finally, whatever may be the event, it will move us to commend them and our cause to the mercy of God in humble prayer.

Our Lord enforces the law of love by impressing upon us the example of our Father in heaven, whose children His disciples have become by His grace through faith in His name. “He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Should not His goodness lead us to repentance for every evil thought and word and deed to our neighbor, seeing how unlike these make us to our Father? Should not His example inspire us to live in love towards all men, not excepting even our enemies? And not only in giving sunshine and rain, meat and drink, raiment and shelter to the evil as well as the good, does our heavenly Father show us how His children ought to live and please Him, but also and especially in the revelation of His grace to us sinners, and in the bestowal of spiritual gifts unto our salvation when we were yet enemies. He gives us His Holy Spirit that by His grace we may become His children and glorify Him by loving and living according to His holy will.

“He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another.” 1 John 4:8-11.

Christ illustrates the principle in the parable recorded in Matthew 18:23-35. A king, taking account of his servants, found one indebted to him to the enormous amount of ten thousand talents. The sum was so large that payment was impossible, and the servant cried for mercy.

“Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him the debt.”

But this pardoned servant found a fellow servant who owed him the small sum of a hundred pence and demanded immediate payment, refusing to hear his appeals for patience until payment could be made, and rejecting all

cries for mercy. This ungrateful and cruel conduct was reported to his lord, who summoned him into his presence and said to him:

“O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors.”

Christians have grace imparted to them by the Holy Spirit to overcome the evil in their nature and enable (hem, as children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, to appreciate the love of their heavenly Father. Should not the love which He showed to us when we were yet enemies, move us to learn of Him how to exercise love to our fellow men?

“Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Eph. 4:30-32.

It is not expected that the natural man will lead such a life of love. The law as our Savior expounds it is obligatory upon all men, and all are accountable under it. But only in the kingdom of Christ is the love of God shed abroad in men’s hearts and the power given to obey it. By nature we are not in the kingdom of God, and cannot enjoy its blessings and perform its duties. Let us not overlook the fundamental condition which our Lord lays down:

“Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5.

Therefore when He appeals to the intelligence of His hearers in the words, “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?" it is not with the presumption that they have nothing to move them, but their innate sense of right. He gives no countenance to the error which was in vogue then as it is now, that notwithstanding our corrupt nature we can have the will and the ability to fulfill the holy law and practice the perfect love which it requires. Something more is demanded than that which the publicans exhibit. As these were generally regarded to be bad men, even the Pharisees could understand that a better life than theirs is requisite for the fulfillment of the law. The reasoning would be valid even from their point of view, that showing love only to those who show love to us, and saluting only those whom we recognize as brethren, does not raise us above the level of the publicans who are so much despised. But our Lord had been teaching His disciples the things of the kingdom of God, and the words which He spake were spirit and life. In these disciples He could therefore appeal to higher motives than those of which the natural man is capable, and with them He could accordingly reason on higher grounds. They should realize our Heavenly Father's love and love their fellowmen as He loves us and them. And now, if we love only them that love us and salute only those endeared to us as our brethren, is it not manifest that we belong rather to the class of despised publicans than to that of blessed children of God? Such love and such salutation is merely the result of our sinful selfishness, giving nothing but that for which we get an equivalent. It is the same unloving spirit which would render evil for evil on the same principle, which can have no place in the kingdom of God where love reigns,

III. The Requirement of Perfection

Finally, the whole matter set forth in this section is summed up in the words:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

The word perfect implies so much, that strenuous efforts have been made to show that it cannot here be employed in its proper sense. But while we should be careful not to wrest it for the purpose of making it say less than the word plainly expresses, we should be equally careful not to put more into it than general usage and the context indicate. The former is done when it is argued that in our sinful condition nothing more can justly be required of us than we have the ability to render, and that the demand made upon us to be perfect can therefore mean no more than that we should do the best that we can in our disabled condition. The other is done when it is argued that, as we are required to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, a state of entire sinlessness is attainable on earth and must, according to our Lord's words, be attained before anyone can be recognized as a true disciple of Christ and an heir of heaven. A further consideration of the term, and of the subject it presents, is therefore necessary for the right understanding of the text.

That is perfect which serves its purpose without a defect or a blemish. In the connection in which the word is here used it refers to the love which is required of Christ's disciples and which the Spirit of Christ sheds abroad in their hearts. This love is defective if it does not embrace enemies in its compass; it has a blemish if it is extended only to those whose love is requited or is expected in return. It is tainted with selfishness when it is not like our Heavenly Father's love, who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Perfect love is required as our Father which is in heaven manifests it to us. Thus our Lord said to the rich young man who inquired what he must do to inherit eternal life, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." Matt. 19:21. The man thought that he had loved his neighbor as himself from his youth up: and now what was lacking yet? The Lord's answer showed him what was lacking. It was the very love which in his conceit he fully possessed, but which in reality consisted with him only in word; and when the young man heard what was lacking, "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." What he needed to be perfect was the possession of pure love in his heart; for "love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. 13:10. What he needed above all was to "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Col. 3:14.

Love is thus seen to be only another name for that holiness of heart which was man's original endowment as created in the image of God, who is love. That constituted his perfectness as the most highly gifted of earthly creatures, and its restoration by the grace of God, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, is what is needed still to constitute it.

“I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy, for I am holy.” Lev. 11:44.

Man was made to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.” Gen. 1:27. He was perfect as he proceeded from the hands of his Maker. All was “very good” until by the instigation of Satan the terrible tragedy occurred in Eden which made our earth a wilderness of sin and woe and death. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12. There was then an end of all perfectness in this world which lieth in wickedness. But God did not in the anger of His righteousness cast away His forlorn creature, but in wrath remembered mercy. He “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. The Eternal Son of God condescended to be born of a woman and made under the law, that He might fulfill all righteousness in our stead, and be obedient unto death for our salvation. At His birth it was announced by the angel:

“Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10, 11.

He lived and died for us that a kingdom of righteousness might be established, in which all who believe in Him should be gathered and be saved with an everlasting salvation. To this end He gives His Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacrament, that we might regain in Him what was lost in Adam.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”
Rom. 8:1.

The Spirit of God has made all things new by their regeneration. They have put on Christ, who is perfect in holiness, and thus, their hearts being purified by faith, the image of God is restored in them. They are perfect in Christ, who is made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, “that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:31.

“Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.” Col. 3:10.

But this renewal of the divine image is the grafting into Christ, by which, through faith in Him, we share all the blessings of the redemption effected through His blood, without having in our own nature been divested of all the evil with which sin has infected it, or being entirely assimilated to the spirit of holiness imparted by the grace of our Lord. The flesh still exists in us and lusts against the Spirit. The new life is therefore a power in us that has not yet expelled all sinfulness from our nature, but that is to be constantly exercised for the destruction of the old Adam and the growth in holiness.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Gal. 2:20.

The power which worketh in us unfailingly impels to a realization in our own lives of the image restored by the Holy Spirit through faith in the Sav-

ior, and therefore we who are in Christ are continually exhorted to walk in holiness worthy of our high calling.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” Gal. 5:25.

Thus the apostle warns Christians against the sins of the Gentiles and says:

“Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the Spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Eph. 4:20-29.

“Be ye perfect” therefore means: Embrace by faith the righteousness acquired for you by the Son of God, which is perfect and which is graciously imputed to those who believe in Him as their Savior; and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who is given to all believers, follow after holiness in the footsteps of Jesus to the praise of His name.

The perfection required thus presents itself in two aspects, and in such two-fold view the word is applied in Holy Scripture. The sincere follower of Christ has by faith a righteousness which avails before God, because he has the perfect obedience and merits of Christ imputed to him. Notwithstanding all his own shortcomings he is perfect in Christ. As against all ungodliness and all hypocritical forms of godliness, the sincere Israelite was even in the Old Testament called perfect. “Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.” Ps. 37:37. St. Paul, speaking of Christ in us the hope of glory, says:

“Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” Col. 1:28.

In Him the image of God is restored and all His perfection of holiness is imputed to them who embrace Him by faith.

But more than this is taught us and secured to us. By His grace the sin that remains in our nature even after conversion shall in the end be totally eradicated, and the personal perfection for which we are striving shall be attained. But we must not flatter ourselves that the promised attainment renders the struggle needless, and that the victory over the world and the flesh and the devil will be won without the good fight of faith. St. Paul's words illustrate the whole subject:

“Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 2:12-14.

The perfect love that includes enemies as well as friends is a gift of the Holy Spirit which all believers possess. But that does not imply that every believer is faultless in the use of the gifts which the Spirit has imparted, or that all have attained the same degree of holiness in the exercise of these gifts. The sin that dwells in our nature is not wholly exterminated until the Holy Spirit's work is completed with the end of this earthly life in the death of the body. Sanctification is a growth unto completion until the end, and therefore never ceases, while this life lasts, to be an object towards the attainment of which the energies of Christians are directed. One cannot be a true disciple of Christ without the faith which worketh by love. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” Every child of God by faith in Christ Jesus recognizes this. But the accomplishment of this holy will of God is a different matter.

“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.” Rom. 7:18.

The Christian's comfort in the Holy Ghost and his joyful assurance of salvation is therefore not made to rest on his perfect attainment of personal holiness in obedience to the will of God, at which he never ceases to aim and for which he never ceases to long, but of which he always comes short until his transfer to the better land "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." By faith he embraces the righteousness acquired for him by the Savior. That is perfect, and clothed in that righteousness he can stand without spot or blemish on the judgment day. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." These are things of which Christians should never lose sight.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9.

The Holy Spirit works in believing hearts holy desires according to the will of God, but never prompts us to put our trust in the holiness attained, but always and only in the Savior's merits. He alone is the Savior from sin and death, and it is those who know themselves saved through His blood that truly walk in the ways of holiness, endeavoring faithfully to discharge their duties in their calling and patiently bearing the ills attending them in their labors of love, but giving all glory to Him alone who saves them.

7. The Sincere Service. Matthew 6:1-8.

THE SERMON THUS FAR has dealt mainly with the Pharisaic failure to understand the import of the law and with the false teaching which resulted. Human ordinances and traditions were laid upon the consciences of the people under the guise of expositions and applications of the divine commandments, and the law was made of no effect by those perversions, which were foisted in as substitutes. But naturally the practice would be as the teaching, and the corruption of the latter would necessarily attach to the former. To these deprivations of the holy service which the law requires the sermon addresses itself in the first part of the sixth chapter. Chief among the observances required, in the estimation of the Jews, were almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. These were regarded by them, as they unfortunately are now by the Roman Church, as the highest and most meritorious virtues, and in the practice of these their carnal cant and hypocritical sanctity became especially manifest. Christ rebukes the hollowness and heartlessness of the Pharisaic formalism and self-righteousness, and urges upon His disciples the better righteousness of sincerity in their service of God.

I. Almsgiving

With regard to almsgiving He says:

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms do 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. 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.”

Giving alms is affording help where it is needed, especially by giving money. All contributions for the support of the poor and the helpless come under this head. The Jewish leaders were right in giving it a high place among the doctrines inculcated by the law.

“The poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying. Thou shalt open thy hand wide to thy brother, to thy poor and to thy needy in thy land.” Deut. 15:11.

To oppress the poor and disregard his wants is a sign of impiety.

“He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoreth Him hath mercy on the poor.” Pro 5:14:39.

Almsgiving is accordingly repeatedly urged upon Christian people in the New Testament. To the rich youth Christ gave the command, as a test of his disposition to do the Lord’s will, to give his possessions to the poor, and the poor widow who cast the two mites, which were all her living, into the treasury, receives the highest commendation for her self-sacrificing love. St. Paul writes:

“Brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia, how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.” 2 Cor. 8:1, 2.

And as the contributions for the help of the needy receive due praise, the miserly stinginess of others who refuse such help, is severely rebuked.

“If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” James 2:15-17.

Hence the exhortation:

“To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Heb. 13:16.

The man who takes all that he can get of earthly goods and refuses to communicate where there is want, not only transgresses the law, but resists the grace of God and should give earnest heed to the admonition:

“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.” 2 Cor. 13:5.

For the covetous man is an idolater. The words of the Savior, “when thou doest thine alms,” implies that His disciples will certainly do them. His sermon is, of course, not directed against almsgiving, but against the false motive which prompted the Pharisees in the performance of the good deed. “When thou doest thine alms do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory

of men.” That is the sin which taints and vitiates their work of charity. They are seeking a human reward for the work which thus becomes a mercenary barter, in which an equivalent in some form is expected. The form here is the praise of men. Not the glory of God, to whom all glory belongs, but their own glory is sought. They do it that they “may have glory of men.” To this end they see that the attention of men must be directed to their performance, and therefore they introduce it with a flourish of trumpets, or that which is equally effectual in turning the eyes of the people upon them. They want to be seen of men, that men may give them the honor, which they think that their righteousness merits. And they have their reward. Men praise them for their deeds. That is what they want, and that is all they get. Alas, how many there are in our times also who do shining deeds of seeming beneficence and call public attention to them that they may have glory of men! They are hypocrites, because they do in the quest of human praise what the Lord has commanded to be done in His name and for His glory. Whilst they make a boast of serving God with their alleged deeds of charity, they are merely gratifying a selfish greed. The evidence of this is their public proclamation of their almsgiving, that they may receive the applause of their fellow men, and their surly conduct when their expectations are not realized. Good deeds need no trumpeting; they speak for themselves, and they accomplish their salutary purpose and receive their reward whether men see them or not. God sees them, and that is enough for His children, whose heart’s desire is to please Him, not to seek the applause of the world. Christ does not forbid almsgiving and other good works in public. When the will of the Lord can be done and His name can be glorified by doing it in the presence of witnesses, the fact that our good works are seen can certainly be no hindrance to our doing them. Whether they are seen or not is of no essential moment. The good that can be done only before others, as when the Lord’s praises are sung in the congregation, must be done as cheerfully and as humbly as that which is done in secret. As we must not blow a trumpet to attract men’s attention to our deeds of charity in order to receive their applause, so we must not hide our candle under a bushel and refuse to let it shine from fear of being called Pharisees. We are to seek no praise for our almsgiving and therefore do our duty, whether men see us or not, knowing that God sees us. But we are to give God the glory; and this will always guard us against the selfishness which seeks publicity for every good work done. Seeking the praise of men destroys the virtuous character of the deed,

however good it would otherwise be. And when men complain of the ingratitude of the world if their efforts are not rewarded with the expected honors, and especially when they on that account cease to do well because, as they allege, it does not pay, they show that they are not sincere in their service of the Lord, but engage in the works of the law for their own rather than their Heavenly Father's glory. Sincere followers of Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, will abound in good works, but never make earthly honors and rewards their motive, since their calling is to do all to the glory of God.

Christ's disciples are taught the better righteousness. "When thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." They are not only not to blow a trumpet before them to draw all men's eyes upon them, but seek to do their alms only in the presence of God, taking care not to flaunt their deeds in the eyes of other men, but to conceal their work even from their own observation, that the left hand may not know what the right is doing; that is, that not only others may know nothing of it, but that even we ourselves do not fix our attention upon it, as if we had done some great thing for which we may at least give ourselves the praise, if we are not permitted to solicit the praise of others. Our hearts are not right before God if we desire the glory of any good work; for it is only by the grace of God and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus that anything really good can be done by us sinful creatures, and the glory of it belongs exclusively to Him who gave us the will and the ability to do it.

"What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" 1 Cor. 4:7.

Such glorying in self and self-achievement is inconsistent with the knowledge of Christ which the Holy Spirit has given us, and with that purpose to live unto Him which is the effect of His working in us.

"How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" John 5:44.

Hence the sincere disciple desires what his Lord requires, that his alms may be in secret. And he has no fears that this shall cast all his labor of love into oblivion and make it useless; for our Lord gives us His promise that “Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Nothing done in the Savior’s name shall be forgotten or be passed by without the gracious reward His loving kindness has in store for His faithful disciples.

“Therefore 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.” 1 Cor. 4:5.

Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The disciple knows that he merits nothing, but he knows also the abounding love of his Lord and is glad, and glories in Him.

II. Prayer

The second great duty mentioned is prayer, of which verses 5-8 treat. No intelligent reader would even for a moment entertain the thought that our Lord’s design is to discourage prayer. It is a necessity of the soul that knows God and puts any trust in Him. All religions cultivate it and practice it, and the more the heart feels its dependence on God and learns to trust His goodness and power, the more it is moved to pray for His help. In the kingdom of Christ this is especially the case, where grace and truth are revealed and applied. There the consciousness of man’s sin and doom and helplessness, and of God’s compassion and gracious provision for their deliverance through the redemption which is in Christ, is wrought in the soul; and sorrow for sin and faith in the pardon pronounced, and the conflicts with the flesh and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, all lead to incessant prayer and praise and thanksgiving. Therefore our Lord teaches us to watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation, and “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.” Luke 18:1. And the apostles in various places repeat the teaching:

“I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayer, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men,” 1 Tim. 2:1.

In the verses before us the command is given again and again that we should pray, and the Holy Spirit never ceases to move us to the exercise of the privilege. It therefore does not need mentioning that our Lord does not direct His rebuke against prayer. It is the Pharisaic spirit manifesting itself in the formalism and self-glorification even in this holy service that is rebuked and warned against. Hence in the next section of the sermon instruction is given how we ought to pray, and a model prayer, usually called the Lord’s Prayer, is presented for our guidance and use.

“When thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. 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. But when ye pray use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ye not therefore like unto them; for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.”

In the first place, two manifestations of self-righteousness and thirst for the praise of men are condemned in the practice of the hypocrite, whose prayers were rather bids for human applause than cries for divine mercy and help. When they prayed they loved to take conspicuous positions in the synagogues and at street crossings, so as to make sure of being seen by men and getting the coveted praise for their pious performances. An illustration of this undevout engagement in the form of prayer is presented in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Luke 18:9-14. The proud and haughty Pharisee, both by his deportment and his words, gave all glory to himself, and showed a spirit that was incapable of appreciating the mercy of God. Inflated with a proud conceit of himself, he could think only of his own supposed achievements and of his superiority to the poor publican, who,

“standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying: God be merciful to me a sinner.” Hearts that are humbled by a sense of their sin and know no refuge from its curse but the grace of God in Christ our Savior, have no thought of flaunting their supposititious righteousness in the face of heaven and of despising the poor sinner who can only cry for mercy. When a sincere man prays he appears before God to find grace in time of need, not before men to win their admiration and gain their applause.

This will prevent the other sin which the hypocrites commit and which has the same bitter root of selfishness. “When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” This includes all inappropriate and superfluous words, as well as the useless and monotonous repetitions whose purpose is to make an impression of superior sanctity by drawing out the prayer to an extraordinary length. The Pharisee’s prayer in the parable referred to, was not exorbitantly long, but it was battology or vain repetition still. He imagined that he was better than other people and told God so. This was vain and profane babbling. And he boasted of fastings and tithe-payings which were beyond what the Lord requires, and pompously exploited himself before his God as if his Maker must make obeisance to him and give him glory. His prayer was not very long, but it was far too long for all that, because every word in it was in vain repetition of his selfish and profane imaginings. He talked entirely too much, and his whole impenitent and self-exalting prayer illustrates the meaning of our Savior’s warning, “Beware of the leaven of hypocrisy.” It is much to be deplored that the Roman Church has so persistently refused to learn of Christ, and continues its dream of creature merit even in the sacred offices of prayer, with singular perversity using the very model prayer, which was given to correct the Pharisaic abuses, as a means of perpetuating them; for the vain repetitions of its rosary not only include numberless “*Ave Marias*,” but also large numbers of “*pater nosters*,” or Lord’s Prayers, the frequent saying of which, over and over again, is supposed to constitute a good work that acquires merit and secures divine rewards. Notwithstanding the restoration of the Gospel by the great Reformation of the 16th century, Rome has hardened itself against the precious truth, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. In the second place, our Lord tells us how we ought to pray in spirit and in truth, avoiding the errors of Pharisees and hypocrites, whose prayers were vitiated by their

self-righteous conceits and thus sank to the level of empty forms and vain observances. The heathens use vain repetitions and think they shall be heard for their much speaking. The false prophets “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.” 1 Kings 18:26. The Ephesian idolaters “all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out. Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Acts 19:34. What good did the repetition do them? Neither to move a Deity nor to persuade a crowd can the continuous calling and crying for hours be of any avail. Christians know in whom they believe, and are aware that their being heard does not depend upon the multitude of their words or the frequency with which they repeat them; and they are certain that their Father knoweth the things they have need of before they ask Him. Therefore they go in confidence to Him and believe the promise, “Ask and ye shall receive.” That Christ tells them to enter into their closets for this purpose and shut the door, is evidently meant to shut out all thought of making their prayer merely a lip service to impress the people with their piety for the purpose of getting praise of men. What they want is that God who seeth in secret should hear their humble cry to Him, in whom alone is their help; and their Father who seeth in secret will reward them openly.

Perplexities which some have experienced with regard to our Lord’s admonitions are needless. The whole scope of the lesson given and the entire context show that there is no reason for entertaining scruples with regard to public prayer, and to earnest importunity in pleading with God. The prayers of the Church must necessarily be in public. Those who gladly received the Gospel “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers.” Acts 2:42. Wherever the Christian people gathered for worship, the Word was preached and prayer was wont to be made. Nor is there anything that should permit a doubt to enter our mind whether under any circumstances our prayers may be long or oft repeated. Our Lord Himself continued all night in prayer, when the weight of human sin was rendering His soul exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. The apostolic exhortation is “Continue instant in prayer;” “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;” “pray without ceasing.” Rom. 12:12; Col. 3:2; 1 Thess. 5:17. Even the repeated offering of the same petition is sometimes the proper course to be pursued in the patient waiting for an answer in God’s good time. Our Lord Himself taught us to be humbly importunate when He spake a parable to this end, “that men ought always to

pray and not to faint.” Prayer is a high privilege of Christ’s disciples, and He would have them prize it and utilize it to the fullest extent, in public and private, for the blessing that is in it. But He would not have it prostituted to selfish ends and brought into the service of the work-righteousness and spurious service which dishonors the Savior and hinders the coming of His kingdom. How intent He was upon maintaining it and having it rightly used is seen in the subsequent verses.

8. The Model Prayer. Matthew 6:9-15.

CHRISTIANS BY THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT desire to exercise the great privilege of prayer, which has God's command as well as promise. Our Lord warns them against the selfishness with which the Pharisees vitiated their performance of what they recognized as a duty, but whose blessing they did not appreciate. Believers appreciate it. It is not as a work of righteousness which they do that it is precious to them. As a mere work of the law, for which a reward is expected as a meritorious performance, they cannot practice it. Against that Christ warns and the spirit in their hearts would protest. Saying prayers in order to fulfill a legal obligation is an idle pretense of service; and doing this with the carnal thought that the performance has a merit in it, and that accordingly God owes us something for it, is a heathenish delusion, of which Christians should never be guilty. If they have known Christ so that they can truly rejoice in the hope of glory, they must know that they are saved by grace through His merit, not their own, and that all praise belongs to Him. But whilst they avoid such grievous errors in regard to prayer, they highly prize the privilege which they have of going to their Heavenly Father in Jesus' name and asking for the daily supply of their needs according to His gracious promises. Every good gift comes from above, and they experience the need of help from heaven every day. Therefore Christ teaches them:

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. 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.”

In this He directs His disciples to pray, shows them how to pray, and gives them a model which will serve as a guide.

Instead of the hollow, boastful prayer of the Pharisees and hypocrites, the principal purpose of which is to be seen of men and thus promote their own glory, the sincere disciple of Christ is taught and moved to go to the Father and tell Him the desires of his soul, in the confidence of being heard and having his wants supplied. It is enough for him that his Father sees him and he can have no object in being seen of others, except so far as his presence in the house of God, which is a house of prayer, and his participation in the public worship, is part of that confession which all Christians are required to make for the extension and edification of Christ's kingdom. Therefore not many words are necessary; for Christians do not think that they shall be heard for their much speaking, and their Father knoweth what they have need of before they ask Him, so that lengthy communications and explications of these needs are quite superfluous. They can trust their Father's wisdom and goodness, and need no argument to sustain their petitions or persuasions to induce Him to grant them. They avoid vain repetitions and much speaking in the presence of their God and Father, but know and believe that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Jas. 5:16.

In all respects the Lord's Prayer is a model for Christian prayer, beginning with the expression of a child's confidence in a loving Father and ending with giving glory to Him alone; and in its brief compass it includes all for which the child of God can pray, and all that conduces to his welfare and his Father's praise. No other prayer ever uttered, beautiful and inspiring as many recorded in Scripture and many published by believers of ancient and

modern times confessedly are, is as compact and as complete in all that properly belongs to sincere Christian prayer.

The question whether our Lord designed to make the use of this form obligatory upon His disciples throughout the whole history of His kingdom on earth, is one that should not trouble the Church, and much of the disputing about it that has occurred displays more zeal without knowledge than intelligent piety: In the new dispensation there are no ceremonial laws. Whoever prays in Jesus' name, believing, will be heard, whatever the form may be in which his prayer is cast. Our Lord and His apostles used other forms besides the Lord's Prayer, and the Christians of all ages have done the same. In the experience of all believers there are occasions when a special need is upon them, and from the fulness of the heart other words will be spoken, in the petitions that flow from it, than those of the model prayer, or of any form at hand. There is nothing in the Scriptures to hamper the believing heart in the expression of its individual wants on special occasions. Sometimes these wants can find no utterance in any form of words, our own or that of others.

“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”
Rom. 8:26, 27.

Christians have free access by faith to the throne of grace, through the atonement made for all men by the sacrifice of Christ, and their acceptance is conditioned by no forms of any sort.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Cor. 3:17.

But considering that our Savior gave us this prayer as an example to teach us how we ought to pray, both as to form and contents, and considering that what we ought to pray for is so succinctly and so clearly and so fully ex-

pressed in this prayer, Christians gladly heed the instruction given them, “after this manner therefore pray ye,” and as gladly use their liberty to employ these very words and, as a rule, to prefer them to all others, as a beautifully brief and compactly complete form of utterance for the desires of their believing hearts. Those who profess abhorrence to all forms of prayer, on the plea that all tend to the formalism which is condemned in the Pharisees, should reflect that putting our petitions into words always results in a form, whether we employ our own words or those of another; that extemporized forms in the public worship are much more likely to result in the vain repetitions and much speaking against which our Savior warns us than the prayers carefully prepared beforehand; and that the use of the Lord’s Prayer secures us against the introduction of much that is not appropriate and the omission of much that ought to be included in the prayers and praises of God’s people.

1. Our Father In Heaven

The Prayer begins with the address to God as “Our Father who art in heaven.” Much unscriptural talk has been in vogue, and perhaps never more than in our time, about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the chief design of Christ’s kingdom came to be regarded as offering a much needed remedy for the social ills of the present life and supplying the necessary helps and stimulants for the betterment of society. Men must learn to live at peace with each other, be just in their dealings and kindly in their intercourse, and help each other in time of need. To this end they are all represented as brethren of one great household with one great Father over all, who is good to all and teaches all His children to be good to one another. When religion enters into this scheme of thought the predominant sentiment naturally is, that the one Father is to be adored, and all the worshippers are one, whether they call that Father Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, or the grand Architect of the universe, or the great Spirit who reigns in the hearts of all men. Where such a conception prevails the statement of our Lord’s meaning, when He taught His disciples to say “Our Father,” is an offense. But that meaning is obvious. He came to establish a kingdom which is not of this world; He gathers a congregation

of believers out of the world, who acknowledge Him to be the way and the truth and the life.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.” John 1:12, 13.

By nature all are children of wrath, because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Therefore we must not marvel that Jesus said:

“Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 5:3.

This kingdom is the company of those whom the Holy Spirit has “begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Pet. 1:3. Not by nature, but by the grace of our Lord are we children of God.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Rom. 8:14-16.

This was the great purpose of Christ’s coming into the world, that we might be saved from our sins and made children of God and heirs of heaven. “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5. And this is effected only by believing in Him and thus entering His kingdom. “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:2-6. No one, whether he be Jew or Gentile, that by unbelief rejects Christ, is a

child of God; “for through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” Eph. 4:18.

When Christ teaches us to address God as “Our Father” in heaven, He therefore desires that we should be children of God through faith in His name, and thus as a brotherhood in Him pray with and for each other to His Father and, through His atoning work and the Holy Spirit’s application of its power and benefits, our Father also. “God would by these words invite us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father.” The relation in which we stand to God by nature, as sinners under condemnation, leads to the distrust of His goodness and the desire to hide away from Him in the fear of punishment; the relation in which we stand to Him by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ prompts us to seek His reconciled face and confidently, on the ground of His invitations and promises, to ask Him for His blessing. “We love Him because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19. And in that same love we embrace our brethren, so that with one heart and one mind we approach God in company with each other and together call Him our Father.

“For whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.” 1 John 5:1.

The words “who art in heaven” remind us that it is not an earthly father that we are addressing, but the King of kings, whom it behooves us to approach with reverence, not bringing our impure earthly thoughts into the presence of His heavenly Majesty.

“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.” Eccl. 5:2.

It is a reminder that our prayers must not be mere forms consisting in vain repetitions, but sincere expressions of the believing heart’s desire for our

loving Father's help and blessing.

2. To Keep God's Name Holy

The highest aim of the child of God is that He may be recognized in His glory and the honor be given Him which is His due. This is expressed in the first petition, "Hallowed be Thy name." The old word "hallow" means the same as sanctify, to make holy, to keep holy. Here it is used in the latter sense; for "God's name is indeed holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also." Moses and Aaron were punished because "Ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel." They did not do what should have been done to have God known and treated as the Holy One. St. Peter exhorts: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." That means that in our hearts we should regard Him holy, treat Him as holy in our thoughts and affections as He is holy in Himself.

We pray that His name may be hallowed or sanctified. The word name signifies that by which an object is known, and therefore ordinarily stands for the thing itself. The name of God is that which presents Him to our minds, and with which is associated all that we know of Him. To hallow His name is therefore to regard Him as holy and so treat Him in all our thoughts and actions. This is done "when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead a holy life according to it. He that teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us." False teaching hinders the true knowledge of God and His will, and thus prevents the hallowing of His name, because notions are inculcated of God which are unworthy of Him and He is made responsible for doctrines and conduct that betray human infirmity and oftentimes human sin.

"Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." Rom. 2:23, 24.

Therefore when we pray this petition we ask God to give us and preserve among us the pure Gospel, and give us grace to adorn the doctrine with a

holy life, that His name may be honored by us and we may be instrumental in leading others to know Him and sanctify His name.

3. The Establishment of God's Kingdom

The second petition follows in natural order. "Thy kingdom come." His name is glorified by the establishment of His reign of grace on earth through Christ's atoning work. "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also." This is accomplished "when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity." The kingdom of God was set up when the Messiah came and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. But it is coming still, and its destined extension over all the earth is not yet completed. There is much to be done yet before all the elect shall be gathered into the fold of the Lord and all who are to enjoy the blessings of the great salvation shall hear the glad tidings. "His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed." Ps. 72:17. For His is an everlasting kingdom, and it must continue to spread until "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Isa. 11:9. And where the name of the Lord has been made known and is hallowed, there is still the exhortation given that we should "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 3:18. In this kingdom all who become partakers of its blessings are required to work and are moved to do this by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. For man does not enter that kingdom and is not preserved in it by the efforts of his own will or the exertion of his own natural powers. It comes to us only when God gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word. The Word of the Gospel is the means which the Holy Spirit employs to work this faith in our hearts. Hence the kingdom of God is organized on earth with a ministry of the Gospel and its accompanying sacraments, in the administration of which all the members have a share and in regard to which they all have a duty.

The Holy Spirit does His work of building the kingdom by the use of the Word and the Sacraments, without which He ordinarily does not come to

man; and the members perform their work when they make provision for the regular administration of these holy means of grace, by which the Holy Spirit is given and men are led to believe and be saved. And thus they are led to live holy lives, as becomes God's people in a kingdom which is not of this world, that their holy life may give God the glory and may commend the Church to the respectful attention of all people, as well as that they themselves may have the joy attending the service of the Lord in doing good works to His praise. Therefore when we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we lay before God our humble request that He would preserve the Church among us and extend it in all lands and among all people, and would bless the use of the means of grace among us, that we, by His grace believing His holy Word, maybe saved, and in our lives by word and work show forth His praise.

4. God's Will Done

If we would honor the name of God and have His kingdom come to us. His will must be done. It is done by the angels in heaven, it will be done by the children of God when they get home to their Father's house, "hereafter in eternity." The third petition, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," therefore appropriately comes next. "The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also." The will of God's infinite love to send His only begotten Son into the world as a sacrifice for human sin; the coming of Christ, in pursuance of this will, to live and die for the fulfillment of all righteousness on our behalf; the mission of the Holy Spirit to apply the redemption to sinners, working faith in them by the Word and Sacraments unto their salvation, and sanctifying them for His service, is done without our prayers, though we might fail to share the benefits designed for the children of men. And the will of God is done in heaven, by angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, without our prayers. But we are yet on earth, and as Christian believers we desire that it should be done here, in us and all around us; and to that end our Savior teaches us to pray.

This good will of God is done "when God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will, which would not let us hallow God's name nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our own flesh,

but strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. This is God's good and gracious will," Satan is the bitter enemy of God and His kingdom and righteousness, and resists every effort to accomplish His will; and the world which lieth in wickedness, and our own sinful flesh are in league with Satan to obstruct these efforts and prevent their success. The more need is there for earnest prayer, that the will of the devil and of the world and the flesh may be defeated by the power of God, and His holy will may be done in spite of all the raging and raving of the enemy against it. That good and gracious will is done by the believer but imperfectly; and as the flesh is weak, though the spirit is willing, he is daily admonished by his own experience not to grow weary in his entreaties to God, that he may have more patience in bearing the tribulations through which he must pass and more zeal in doing the work to which he is called, so that the will of God may be done and His glory promoted.

5. Our Bodily Needs

The fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," pertains to our bodily needs. In our prayer we are taught to think first of God, and to ask for those things which pertain to the glory of His great name, the coming of His kingdom of truth and righteousness, and the accomplishment of His good and gracious will. Only then are we to think of ourselves and our manifold wants. Nor must we be surprised that among these the wants of our bodies should be mentioned first, though these are by no means the most important. In a certain sense they lie at the foundation of all others. The introduction of sin into the world and the curse which lies upon it has made subsistence seem precarious and the procuring of bread a constant and harrowing care, of which our crippled nature cannot divest itself and which can be thrown off only by that faith that comes confidently to our Father in the assurance that He will provide for His children. The other things of this life cannot rivet our attention while starvation is staring us in the face and the dread of it is tormenting us. Our nature's first care is for meat and drink and raiment, and this must occupy our minds and engage the activity of our bodies chiefly, as long as we have not been brought to trust in God's promises and cast our cares on Him; and when this happy state is attained by the power of the Holy Ghost, it will find its appropriate exercise in calling upon

our Father in heaven who careth for us, to supply all our wants according to His gracious promise. It is the Lord's way of relieving us from the cares which are rebuked in a subsequent part of the sermon, and setting our minds free to give attention to the paramount interests of the soul and the life beyond the grave.

The wording of the petition in the original is so unusual as to have caused some perplexity and some controversy; but the result of study and investigation has always been substantially the same as that expressed in our English translation. The word "bread," as is the case in common usage, embraces all the necessaries of life, as when we speak of earning our bread. It means "everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." It is a petition for God's blessing upon us in our earthly pilgrimage, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." We ask for what is necessary today: we do not know whether we shall be living tomorrow, but we do know that tomorrow God will be living still, and if we live we can then ask for tomorrow's bread, as Christians ought to pray daily for each day's needs. "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." The petition recognizes our dependence upon God for all that we possess, with childlike confidence asks Him to give us what we need, and brings to Him our thank-offering for His daily gifts.

6. Forgive Us

Sin is man's trouble on earth, and his barrier in the way to heaven. Unless that is removed, all is lost. This is not overlooked in our Lord's Prayer. The fifth petition brings it before our Father with the same confidence with which the other petitions are presented. "Forgive US our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." If any doubt remained in a reader's mind whether the prayer was designed for believing Christians, who alone are true children of God and alone can truly call Him Father, this petition

must convince him, assuming that he is willing to be instructed by the Savior's words; for only believers can say to God with sincerity, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. The petition implies a consciousness of sin, but makes no attempt to justify it. Forgiveness is all that it asks, and all that with truth and sincerity we can ask. He who acknowledges his sins, but does not repent, can have no disposition to appear before God with the burden resting upon him which unfits him for such an appearance. "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer: for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them: but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment: so will we also heartily forgive and readily do good to those who sin against us."

What gives the Christian confidence to offer such a petition, notwithstanding all his unworthiness to receive blessings and his conscious desert of punishment, is that God in His infinite love and mercy gave His own dear Son to save us, "who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification," Rom. 4:25, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." Luke 24:47. This preaching Christians believe, and therefore they go to the Father, to whom they have access in Jesus' name, and are sure that their sins are forgiven daily and richly, and that no good thing will be denied them on account of their sins; for "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Rom. 8:32. They who come to the Father in the name of Him who died for their sins have no fear that their prayer will not be heard.

The second part of the petition "As we forgive those who trespass against us," is misunderstood when it is represented as a condition of their forgiveness, as if our forgiveness of others constituted some sort of merit by which our Father is moved to forgive us. But it does imply that those who offer the petition are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and therefore by the grace of the Holy Spirit have the will to forgive others as God forgives them. Our Lord lays stress upon this in the 14 and 15 verses of this chapter, which form a note to the fifth petition. There He says:

“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.”

Let not the ground of our forgiveness be lost out of sight. Christ died for our sins, fulfilling all righteousness in our stead; that is the reason why God forgives us. If a condition were to be mentioned, it must be found in faith; for only he who believes is in actual possession of the forgiveness of sins. But this again is not because something has been done by us on account of which God is willing to forgive us. Faith is indispensable, because in the merciful plan of God it is the only means on our part to appropriate the forgiveness of sin which God bestows freely, graciously, for Christ's sake, not for the sake of anything that we have done or can do. But for our own assurance it is highly important to remember, that if our faith is sincere and we have truly appropriated God's gracious forgiveness, we have the grace also to forgive others.

7. Daily Forgiveness

But whilst the work of our Lord is perfect and the remission of our sins rests on a ground which no power of earth or hell can overthrow, our work is full of imperfections. On this account we not only meet daily forgiveness and daily pray for it, but must be on our guard lest we fall away from the only sure foundation of our hopes. Therefore our Lord teaches us, in the sixth petition, further to pray: “And lead us not into temptation.” The form of the petition suggests to some minds, taking the word temptation in the sinister sense of probation with the purpose of effecting a fall, the anxious query, whether we are to assume that God does sometimes lead us into snares. That is an evident misapprehension, the meaning being clearly this, that our heavenly Father would protect us against the snares which the enemy places in our way to compass our destruction. Luther's explanation is in exact accord with the mind of our Savior:

“God indeed tempts no man; but we pray in this petition that He would guard and keep us, so that the devil and the world and the flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair or other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory.”

This is what the Scriptures teach us on the subject:

“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. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” James 1:13-15.

The evil is not in the objects which we meet in the journey of life and with which we must deal in the duties of our calling, but in Satan and men, whose will opposes the good will of God and abuses the things which He has given for our use. Money, for example, is not a wicked thing, nor is it sinful to have it and use it, but it becomes a temptation when we lust after it, the result of which, if the longing is not resisted and overcome, will be the sinful act of fraud or theft, the fall from grace, and finally death. The fault is in us, and against the rise and progress of such greed our prayer is directed.

That which our lust makes a temptation to evil would otherwise be merely a trial of our faith which is unavoidable, and which God makes a blessing to His faithful children. Therefore St. James writes again:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work.” Jas. 1:2-4.

And again in 5:12:

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.”

The evil uses to which all earthly things may be put make the Christian life a daily trial of our faith and love, because the devil and the world and the flesh are continually suggesting these evil uses for self-gratification. The Christian life is therefore a continual conflict between the Spirit and the flesh.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy,” 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.

All the ills, physical and moral, individual and social that have come into the world as a consequence of sin, put our Christian sincerity on probation, and every pain and even pleasure may be a temptation, which trials always become when our hearts turn from the purpose to glorify God to the sinful gratification of self. When we are not on our guard our flesh deceives us and we are seduced into misbelief and despair, or other great shame and vice. Our prayer is that God would so lead us that such calamity may not come upon us. The trials will come and we do not ask to be exempt from them. They are necessary incidents in our earthly condition, and God turns them all to blessings, when we meet them in His service and humbly trust in Him in the denial of self and devotion to His will. But we do ask that we may endure the trial and be found approved. And for this we have the divine promise.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but 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.” 1 Cor. 10:13.

Even when our deceitful hearts incline to the wicked seductions of the world and the devil, and the struggle with the flesh is upon us, we know that God can and will help, and therefore confidently ask Him to give us the victory.

8. To Give Us A Blessed Life and End

Finally we pray in the seventh petition, “But deliver us from evil.” That means ultimately deliverance from every tribulation that sin has brought into this world and from this earthly life itself. “We pray in this petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor, and finally, when our last hour has come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.” We would not live always in the present world, which sin has made a wilderness that is full of trouble and sorrow. The Christian is content to live here as a stranger and pilgrim journeying to a better land, and do his work here as a servant of God, who guides him, protects him, blesses him, and makes all things work together for good to him. He does not murmur nor complain that he must suffer; at least he knows that if murmurings arise they come from the flesh and must be resisted as temptations to sin against the Lord who rules over him and who doeth all things well. But he would fain be released from the burdens which he must bear, and is therefore glad to seek help and comfort in prayer to Him who has promised deliverance in due time and in due measure. As the evils of this world include not only sin in ourselves, with the internal disturbances which it causes, but also all its consequences in nature and society, we do not ask to be exempt from the common lot of men to suffer pain and sickness, losses in property and aspersions of our good name, nor to be at once transferred from earth to heaven and thus rid of earthly woe. This we must leave in our Father’s hands, and rejoice that He cares for us and will in His wisdom and goodness do for us what is best. We leave that to Him, but still we pray, “deliver us from evil.” And our Savior has taught us thus to pray, so that we are sure that we are doing right when we come to our Father with such a petition. Our Lord Himself so prayed for us:

“I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil.”

He will guard us against the deadly power of sin, and will in His own time, when we have served His purpose in our stay on earth, take us to Himself in heaven. Thus all is well.

9. The Doxology

The prayer concludes with an epilogue, generally called the doxology, which perhaps was not originally a part of it and which is not given in the gospel of St. Luke, but which forms an appropriate ending of the beautiful prayer. The words are:

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.”

We are taught to pray as members of the kingdom which is not of this world, and in which, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have by faith the peace of God on earth and the gracious hope of living in blessedness forever in heaven. This gives zest to our prayer and makes us sure that we shall be heard. The kingdom is His and He will protect and prosper it, and see that it attains the end of its establishment. And His is the power, so that nothing can hinder the attainment of His purpose; for omnipotence is enlisted in its favor. How could the Christian doubt that every request which our Lord teaches us to make will be granted, when He who teaches us thus to pray has infinite power to answer our petitions? And all the more confidence can the believer have that he shall receive what he asks, because the glory all belongs to God and he delights to ascribe it to Him. The conclusion is adapted to inspire the same confidence of being heard which is given in the introduction. And the amen has the same design. It means that “I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to my Father in heaven and heard, for He Himself has commanded us to pray and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen; that is yea, yea, it shall be so.” Christians must not

doubt when God tells them to say Amen to their prayer. He says that it shall be so, and shall we not believe him? "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' Matt. 21:22. It is those who ask not, or who ask in unbelief, that receive not.

“This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.” 1 John 5:14.

9. The Pharisaic Fasting. Matthew 6:16-18.

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. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy 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."

CONSIDERING THE ABUSE to which fasting was subjected by the Pharisees and the scandals which have been associated with it in the Church, we might expect that Christ, when He comes to speak of this, would renounce and condemn the practice altogether. The regulations in vogue among the Jews pertaining to it were human ordinances, which served no good purpose, and the abuses readily attached themselves to it. Our Lord foreknew also that such abuses would be connected with its continuance among His disciples, so that Christian readers would experience little surprise if He had entirely forbidden fasting as a needless external discipline. But the abuse does not abolish the use, and it is the abuse, not the use, which He condemns.

Fasting was commanded in the old dispensation only on the day of atonement, but was freely practiced and frequently commended as a generally recognized auxiliary in the prosecution of a holy life. The Pharisaic multiplication of fasts and days of fasting was by their own device, and their human ordinances in this regard imposed burdens which were not laid upon the Jewish people by the Mosaic law. Vain conceits of the efficacy soon attached themselves to the self-chosen fasting, and as early as the times of Isaiah evils were connected with it which called forth the prophet's rebuke.

“Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure and exact all your labors. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and 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?” Isa. 58:3-7.

The Mosaic law rather tolerated than ordained the fasting so much in vogue, so highly prized, and so greatly abused by the Israelites. In the times of our Savior fasting was classed by their teachers with almsgiving and prayer as one of the great virtues of the people of God, and the Pharisees prided themselves in the zeal with which they cultivated and practiced it. Among the boasts of the proud Pharisee of the parable was this, that he fasted twice in the week, thinking himself better than the poor publican, not only because he was not, like him, a great sinner, but that he had even many works of supererogation to his credit.

Notwithstanding this our Lord did not forbid fasting. The law did not require it, but it had its uses as a discipline. It was the abuse that He desired to abolish, not the use. This is apparent from His answer to the disciples of John the Baptist, who asked Him,

“Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them. Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to till it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.” Matt. 9:14-16.

Fasting is afflicting the soul in self-mortification. That is appropriate in times of sorrow, but not in times of Joy. When Jesus, your heavenly Bridegroom, is with you, it is a time of rejoicing, and fasting would not be proper. Sorrows will come in the natural order of God’s government, and then is the time to bear them; we must not distress ourselves when He gives us occasion for gladness. And more than this our Savior impresses in His answer. The Gospel has come to take the place of the law. It is no more suitable now to patch up the legal ordinances with its new cloth than it would be to patch up an old garment with new material that would not hold in the old that is worn out, but would tear it and make the rent worse. The new dispensation has no use for human ordinances such as those bound upon the Jews in the old, but introduces a new life from the fulness of Christ.

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” 2 Cor. 5:17.

All the efforts of erring religionists, whether they be called Romanists or Socinians, to mend Judaism and give it a Christian coloring, only deludes souls and hinders the triumph of the Gospel. Fasting has no merit and no power to save, and no obligation is laid "upon Christ’s disciples to observe it.

But it does not follow that it is forbidden them. Our Lord says that the days will come when they shall fast, and the instruction given in the text assumes its practice, and shows the sinful abuse that is to be shunned. His disciples had occasion for sorrow when He was removed from them by His death upon the cross, and they were left for a little while as sheep without a Shepherd when His body lay in the grave. And later, when the persecutions

came and they were cruelly treated, as their Master had been treated before them, they were often bowed down with grief and even with pain. Then mourning and fasting was in accord with their condition.

Fasting consists primarily in abstaining for a season from the customary meat and drink, the proper use of which has nothing sinful in it. Naturally, when men for good reason see fit to engage in it, the abstinence will be extended to other appetites and desires in our nature that seek gratification. The underlying principle is that of making everything subservient to the eternal interests of the soul. This is expressed by St. Paul when he says:

“I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway.” 1 Cor. 9:27.

In this wider sense fasting would include all that is involved in the self-denial and self-discipline, so important in the Christian struggle for the maintenance of spiritual life, in opposition to the lusts of the flesh.

“There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus; who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:1.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8:12-14.

It is therefore easy to understand why fasting was retained in the Christian Church, Even in the limited sense of abstinence from meat and drink, that the flesh may not be pampered by indulgence and gain ascendancy over the Spirit's work in our hearts, it has important uses. All that is needed is to safeguard it against abuse.

Fasting must not be regarded as necessary, whether as a duty under the law or a means of grace under the Gospel, and must not be practiced as a meritorious work. It is not made obligatory by any divine law, so that its performance in any given form is a Christian duty. It is wholly a matter of Christian liberty. The flesh must be crucified, if we would be faithful disciples of Christ and live as children of God. Of that there can be no doubt in Christian minds. And if fasting be understood to mean simply that, it is plainly a requirement of the Christian life and thus a Christian duty. But let us not misunderstand the matter and needlessly trouble ourselves. Confusion makes trouble. To crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts is a manifest duty for spiritual self-preservation, and fasting is denying ourselves some indulgences as a means to that end. But when fasts are prescribed to us, such as abstaining from certain kinds of food and certain kinds of drink, the Christian reasonably asks: Where is that written in the Word of God? He is a free man in Christ, and in his conscience knows himself bound by no law but that of God.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Gal. 5:1.

No man is our Master but Christ. If, for example, the demand be made upon us to abstain from eating pork at any time, or eating any kind of meat on certain days; or it be forbidden us to take a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, the believer in Christ, jealous of his liberty, properly asks by what authority such a demand or such a prohibition is imposed upon him. He is free in these things, because the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, and can recognize no obligation to obey human ordinances, whether as substitutes for those which are divine or as additions to them. Only God has authority over him. Such fasting he is free to practice, but no human law can make it obligatory upon him. If, on the other hand, the commandments of the decalogue are urged upon us, we at once recognize their authority, because we know them to be given of God, and we would not be Christians if we did not at once acknowledge our duty to obey. But that is not fasting. The exercise of fasting is always wrong, when engaged in with the thought that we

are thus fulfilling the divine law and doing a holy work, because it always lies in the sphere of liberty.

Nor is fasting to be regarded as a means of grace under the Gospel, so that it would be obligatory upon Christians because of a power exerted through it by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures teach nothing about such an operation of God upon the soul in virtue of man's abstinence. Fasting is man's act, not God's. It is an exercise for the subduing of the flesh and the curbing of sin, not for the stimulation of spiritual power. It is a means of disciplining our sinful nature, not of strengthening the new man which the Holy Spirit has created in the believing heart, and which He alone sustains and invigorates by the Word and Sacraments as His ordained means of grace. It should not be doubted that fasting is a valuable auxiliary in promoting Christian holiness. But this is not because it furnishes new power or even motives to this end. As a human act it cannot supply divine gifts and minister divine influences. The help which it affords is of a negative sort. It curbs the motions of sin, that the work of grace may be less obstructed, as the removal of weeds gives the grain better opportunity to grow, though it furnishes no new life and vigor. Fasting is a personal act, performed and designed for self discipline to weed out the morbid growths of our sinful nature: the growth in holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, without which fasting avails nothing, and trusting in it as a good work is a dangerous delusion.

Hence all thoughts of merit attaching to it, as they are inculcated and practiced under the papacy, must be banished from our minds, with other superstitions in vogue among the adherents of Rome in regard to which the Gospel restored to us by the Reformation has given us light. There is no merit in sinful man. Not even his best works, though done by -the power of grace, can be meritorious before God. For this conviction there are two reasons drawn from the Scriptures. One is the demerit of the sinner, the other is the merit of the Savior.

All that man deserves now, since by sin he has turned away from God and become a rebel against Him and His righteous rule, is the punishment which his Maker has pronounced upon him. Before Him all claim of merit is absurd. He merits the death to which he is doomed. The favor of his offended God, the life that he has forfeited, the blessedness of heaven which he has lost, he cannot merit. What he may do to avert the wrath to come can

only increase his guilt, because it is all soiled by the sin of his soul. He can do nothing to please God in his state of rebellion.

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Rom. 3:10-12.

What sense can there be then in harboring the proud thought that human merit is possible and that by strenuous effort on our part a claim may be established against God? Even if we did a thousandfold more of good, seeming and real, than it is possible for man in his best estate on earth to do, no rational ground for a claim of merit could be devised.

“When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say. We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” Luke 17:10.

To many people the saying has a harsh sound, but the words are spoken in tender compassion. We cannot fulfill the law; “for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law: but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Gal. 3:21, 22. But even if by the Holy Spirit’s power one were made perfect in holiness, so that he did all that is commanded, he would merit no reward. He would then have done that which it was his duty to do; that is, he would have paid the debt that he owes. But does any reasonable person think that when he pays his debts he establishes a claim against the person paid? In view of man’s sinfulness and disability, the whole theory of merit before God is preposterous.

But there is another reason why Christians should refuse to entertain any thoughts of claiming rewards of God for meritorious works. The Son of God was made flesh and dwelt among us, that He might fulfill all righteous-

ness in our stead. He satisfied all the demands of the law as our Substitute, that His merit might be imputed to us and we sinners thus stand justified before God. He not only lived a holy life, entirely without sin, as the commandments of God require of man, but suffered the penalty of all men's transgression by His death upon the cross for our salvation. His holy life and bitter sufferings and death fulfilled all righteousness for us. This constitutes the merits of Christ, through which, by His grace through faith, we escape the damnation of hell and inherit the glory of heaven. The damnation we have deserved by our sin, but Christ bore it for us; the glory we have not deserved, but Christ acquired it for us. These merits of our Savior are now offered us in the Gospel, offered us freely, without money and without price, and nothing is asked of us but that we believe the good tidings, and thus by faith accept the salvation. And now come the Romanists and other ungrateful errorists and tell the people that they must have a merit of their own in order to be saved, thus refusing to accept the sufficiency of Christ's merit, denying Him the honor which belongs to Him alone, and arrogating it to themselves and depriving themselves of the comfort which only faith in His merits can secure. The foolish fancy of creature merit undermines the assurance of the sinner's justification by faith, whether designed or not, and tends to destroy the foundation of Christianity by obscuring the Savior's merit.

Fasting has no merit, and can have none. Better reject it entirely than accept it in disparagement of Christ's merit, and thus make a free practice an instrument of evil. But our Lord did not forbid it, and if we are willing to learn of Him, the Pharisaic evil may be eliminated and the exercise be profitable. The hypocrites found merit in it and desired the glory of it. "Hence they desired to be seen of men to fast." It is this that our Lord rebukes, and it is against this he warns them and us and all people. They sought their own glory, while their duty and that of all men is to glorify God. Self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our fallen nature that vitiates everything, because it removes God and all holiness, of which He alone is the fountain. Men may fast if they choose, and may profit by it if their fasting be in penitential meekness. "But 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." They thus may get some human applause, but that is all the reward they have. With those who seek the glory of God it is enough that He sees their efforts to live righteously and godly and soberly in this present world;

and He who seeth in secret shall, in the abundance of His grace, without any merit or anything of theirs, reward them openly.

Too much stress can not be laid upon the fact that fasting always pertains to objects and conduct that are not determined by divine law. They are matters of liberty, which are accordingly subject to human choice. Even when the word is used in the widest sense as including the mortification of the flesh, it is not the renunciation of sin and refraining from actual sins that is contemplated, but such acts as, though not forbidden, are judged to be injurious in their tendency, whether by suggestion, association, habit or otherwise. When sins are had in view, fasting is not the correct word to designate our abstinence. To refrain from cursing and swearing, from lying and stealing, is not properly fasting. This is abstaining from something that could not be done without sin. Eating and drinking are not regulated by divine commandments. Our own judgment must decide what and when and how much we shall eat or drink, and when we have settled habits in this regard we may depart from the rule on certain occasions for our own benefit; as when we deny ourselves some regular meals, or the eating of meat or the drinking of coffee. If we think this desirable, there is nothing to prevent the execution of our thought. We fast. No one has a right to forbid it. But neither has anyone a right to lay it as a law upon our consciences. We can do as we please about it. When Rome imposes such fasts upon the people and teaches them that this is a good work of Christian obedience which God will reward, she tyrannizes our consciences and deceives them, committing the grave sin of making additions to God's Word and teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, and at the same time misleading her members by instilling hopes which can never be realized. The law of fasting, which is a good external discipline to be used by Christians in the exercise of their liberty when they see reason for it, becomes an abomination when thus imposed as a duty; and such law, imposed without right and obeyed without reason, cannot fail to result in the vainglorious fasting which Christ rebukes as Pharisaic delusion.

10. The Abiding Treasures.

Matthew 6:19-23.

IN ALL THEIR SERVICE the disciples of Christ are taught to be sincere, avoiding all hypocrisy and theatrical displays of righteousness. But it must be a sincere service of God, according to His Word and with undivided hearts. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” This our Lord teaches in the next section of the sermon, which may be taken as an exposition of the first commandment, that we shall have no other God above Him who has revealed Himself to us as the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth and the gracious Savior of the sinful world: that we should fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. With Him we are to lay up our treasures. By the light of His Word we are to discriminate between the heavenly and the earthly. The service of two masters of different aims is impossible: serve the Lord alone. Our activity in such service with undivided hearts will always be directed to His glory and result in spiritual riches.

“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; for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”

Christ desires us to give Him our heart; that is essential to life in His kingdom. But when this is done, our affections cannot be fixed upon the things of earth, which do not abide and cannot satisfy the wants of our immortal souls. Even if they contained all that our souls at present need, which they

do not, they do not last, and therefore fail to still the longings of immortal souls.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, hut is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” 1 John 2:15-17.

The soul was made for God and can find happiness only in Him, to whom it is the purpose of our Savior to lead us, that v.o may have eternal blessedness, undisturbed by the passing away of this earthly sphere, where we have our temporary abode.

It is therefore manifest folly to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, where lasting possessions are impossible. The soul abides when this world has passed away, and the riches and honors and pleasures which it offered have passed away with it. Hence the repeated admonitions of the Scriptures not to seek these transient things and to be misled by the allurements which they present to our sinful flesh. And v>e have great need of such warning, because sin has blinded us to the eternal realities and made us subject to the fascinations of temporal vanities. Even Christians, who are no longer in the bonds of iniquity, but rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, have need of them, because in them, too, the flesh still struggles for the mastery over the gifts of the spirit. When the good seed is sown among men, some fall by the wayside, some on the rock, some among thorns, and some on good ground.

“That which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” Luke 8:14.

The gold and silver of the world present a powerful temptation, and many a soul is lost by overestimating and craving such earthly possessions. The foolish thought is entertained that wealth provides against cares, secures

honors and pleasures, and insures happiness and contentment which are not otherwise obtainable. But riches are themselves not secure where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. And that is not the worst of the fatuous greed for great earthly possessions.

“They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For 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. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” 1 Tim. 6:9-11.

Following the wisdom of this world, which disdains the wisdom that cometh down from above, is manifest in nothing more than in this stupid laying up of treasures on earth to the neglect of the abiding treasures in heaven. In one of Christ’s parables a certain rich man who was greatly prospered, in the pride of his heart says:

“I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” Luke 12:19, 20.

Truly a very fool is he who makes the things that perish his confidence and hope: for he must at last perish with them.

Christ teaches us heavenly wisdom when He urges us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where things do not decay and men do not steal. These treasures are the imperishable things which God has promised to His people in His kingdom of glory, if they remain faithful until death in His kingdom of grace. That means that they embrace these promises through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and serving God on earth they are sure of enjoying the blessedness secured for us in heaven. That is unspeakably glori-

ous and great; for “eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which He hath prepared for them that love Him.” Glorious things are revealed to us of the great salvation offered us in Christ, and glorious things are given us in the promises of our Lord, who has gone to prepare a place for us, that where He is there we may be also. But the realization of it all, now and here, is beyond our earthly capacity even in hope.

“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”
Rev. 2:10.

And as our names are written in heaven, where our eternal inheritance is as children of God, and our Father has promised by grace to reward every good deed done in our Savior’s name, we can lay up treasures day by day in our heavenly home, where our heart is because our treasure is there. Thus “our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Phil. 3:20.

We are not induced to regard the earthly gifts which God’s bounty bestows as undesirable and worthless. The lesson taught is not that they should be avoided and we should learn to despise them. There is no indication that the text is designed to convey such a thought, which is the offspring of minds prone to fly to the opposite extreme when errors are warned against. To say that a coin is not gold is not saying that it has no value. Only if the attempt were made to pass it off for gold would it be pronounced worthless, because spurious. All temporal things have their temporal use and value.

“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.” 1 Tim. 4:4, 5.

During our earthly life we need earthly things, and the good providence of God supplies them according to our needs.

“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.” Ps. 145:15, 16.

Despising the gifts pertaining to our bodies and external relations is no evidence of true spirituality. On the contrary, it comes of a lack of appreciation of our Heavenly Father’s goodness as manifested in the blessings daily showered upon us for our earthly support and comfort. We are taught to pray for our daily bread and not to forget the thanksgiving which we owe to God for its bestowal. What Christ would have us recognize and properly appreciate is the difference between the temporal and the eternal, and the corresponding worth of each. To care for money and goods, honors and pleasures, to the neglect of the treasures that are everlasting, is the folly from which our Lord would deliver His disciples. Temporal things have temporal worth, but they are not rightly appreciated when they are placed on a level with the things that are eternal or made a substitute for them. Let us give earnest heed to the important lesson, that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. What in our eyes has the greatest value absorbs our thought. And our souls acquire the character of the things which are most precious to us. We become more worldly minded the more the things of the world are prized. If a man occupies himself with money-making as the chief object of his endeavors, he will become groveling and mercenary in his motives, and his heart will become cold and hard as the gold to which he clings. If he pursues the pleasures derived from the gratification of his sensual appetites, he becomes increasingly brutish by his choice of a merely animal life, which gives no scope to the exercise of those higher powers which distinguish the creature made in the image of God. All experience shows that the heart loses all loftiness of purpose and nobility of aspiration when it habitually delves in the dirt of earth and wallows in the mire of lust. The idolatry which makes a god of the temporal things given us to be used in the service of our heavenly calling and thus to be under our control instead of making us their slaves, unfits us for the gathering of any treasures in heaven where God reigns and where they may be our joy for ever. Therefore “if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.” Ps. 62:10. God may give them to us, and as His gift they are designed to serve a good purpose. But they are temporal and pass away, and if we have put our trust in them

we are forsaken when they depart. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Then your hearts will be there; occupying your thoughts with them will make you heavenly minded; and when your earthly journey is ended you, too, will be there and enjoy your everlasting treasure.

To discern this blessed treasure we need a spiritual eye which sees what the natural eye cannot see.

“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 different organs of the body have each its special office. The one cannot perform the functions of the other, and each serves the whole body in doing its appropriate work. All the light we have is furnished by the eye. If that fails, no other organ can supply the defect; and however powerful and active the other organs may be, we remain in complete darkness. The blind man has no light; but if the eye is sound and properly used, the whole body is full of light.

In spiritual things there is a light needed which nature does not supply. The eye of the soul in that respect is evil. By nature men “walk in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God by the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Eph. 4:17, 18. In consequence even the religious light which may be derived from the works of God is perverted, and the Gentiles “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” Rom. 1:25. The help for this natural evil is found only in the Gospel which the Savior brought us and which is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe. Therefore the apostle prays:

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.” Eph. 1:17-19.

This natural blindness is not healed at once, though the Holy Spirit restores our sight and gives us the light by His Word which shines in the dark places. Even Christians have eyes that are not single and need purging, some of them so far neglectful of the Word given them by revelation and the Holy Spirit’s counsel and warning that they are in daily peril of stumbling and falling into the pit whence they had been delivered. Thus the Spirit writes to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans:

“I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.” Rev. 3:15-18.

But too many of those who profess to be Christ’s disciples have not an eye single to His glory, and still flatter themselves that all is well with them as long as they remain members of good standing in the Christian congregation. Their danger is the greater because they see not the peril of neglecting the Word, which alone gives us the light of salvation, and of trusting in the light which nature is supposed to ’give, but which does not prevent them from seeing double and thus perverting the heavenly truth, and does not

guard them against the double-dealing to which the lusts of the flesh incline.

The eye is single when God alone is seen as the highest good and His Word alone is accepted as our guide in things pertaining to the soul's life.

“Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” Ps. 73:24-26.

And if we would abide with Him and enjoy Him as our everlasting treasure, we must continue in His Word, by which He manifests His gracious presence and blesses us.

“Deal bountifully with Thy servant, that I may live and keep Thy Word. Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” Ps. 119:17, 18.

Against this the flesh relucts, which would have us look towards carnal gratifications and see the fleshpots of Egypt as well as the beauty of holiness, and squint at both. The lust of the eyes will not cease to trouble Christians while they live in this world that lieth in wickedness. But the flesh must be crucified, not gratified.

“I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.” 1 Cor. 9:27.

If by the grace of our blessed Savior we are resolved to walk with God, He is faithful who has promised to sustain us and give us the victory.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” 1 John 1:6.7.

Those who lay up for themselves treasures on earth instead of seeking the treasures which endure when the earth shall have passed away, thus make manifest that their sight is impaired. Their eye is not single, else they would see the eternal treasure and be able to discern it as of the highest worth, whilst their choice of the temporal instead, betrays their incapacity to see what is best. Either they do not see the everlasting good at all, thus showing their spiritual blindness; or, if they by grace have received some enlightenment which by nature they cannot possess, they fail to make the proper use of it and consequently see double, the transitory things of this life being made to seem eternal treasures. It thus comes to pass that things of no permanent value are eagerly gathered, as children gather shards and pebbles, in the delusive belief that they are treasures of abiding value. The delusion would be apparent if men could see clearly. But when they have no spiritual eye, or its vision is impaired by the unresisted influence of the sin which ever tends to blind us, it is not strange that the evidence presented to convince rational creatures of their folly, fails to direct their steps into the paths of wisdom. The garments which they prize so highly become moth-eaten; the medals which are their pride are spoiled by the rust that corrodes them; the money which they have laid up as their hearts' delight becomes the prey of thieves who break through and steal; and still the foolish soul esteems them as precious treasures that furnish present pleasure and secure future happiness.

“If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” The light of God's grace is still shining upon us through the Gospel: blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.

“Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying. What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said. This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul. Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:15-21.

11. The Life of Trust. Matthew 6:23-34.

OUR LORD FURTHER ILLUSTRATES and impresses the necessity of laying up treasures in heaven by showing that, if we are sincere in our devotion to God, He alone must reign in our hearts and Him only must we serve, everything must be subordinated to His will and all be for His glory. “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 can not serve God and mammon.” We may be subject to a master who gives his orders through a subordinate, and one who is faithful will render his service as cheerfully when a requirement is made by the agent as when made directly by the master, provided he is sure that the Master orders it. This is sometimes erroneously regarded as serving two masters. But only one is the master, and only one possesses authority to command. If the agent cannot show that the requirement made of us is that of the master, he cannot claim obedience. God never delegates His supremacy to a creature, requiring subjection to such a substitute as absolutely as to Himself. Neither in Church nor State has He placed rulers over us whom we are bound to obey without appeal to Him who alone is Lord of all. Not even in the case of ministers of the Gospel, who are said to rule over us and whom we are required to obey, can we serve two masters, one being the Lord, the other being His minister. God alone rules over us, and He does this by His Word, to which all, ministers and hearers, are alike bound. Our obedience in the Church is due to that Word, not to the minister who preaches, whether he preaches the Word or not. We are not bound absolutely to obey any man, though he proudly call himself God’s vicegerent on earth, unless he can show that what He demands of us is written in the Holy Scriptures and is therefore demanded by the authority of Him who alone is Monarch in the universe. As regards the civil government to which, as the “powers that be,” we must needs be subject because they are ordained of God, the matter is equally plain. The State

has no authority whatever in the spiritual things which are committed to the Church, but deals only with temporal affairs, that the people may be protected in their common rights and in their legitimate pursuits, and lead quiet and peaceable lives. If any “powers that be” should become arrogant and attempt to usurp authority over our consciences, and thus set themselves up as masters other than God, by whose ordinance and for whose purposes they have been made rulers, the Scriptures make our duty clear by telling us that “we ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29. We can not serve two masters claiming equal authority. Least of all can we serve two masters in every way so diverse and morally so contrary as God and mammon.

But absurd as the thought is, there are many who live as if they deemed it practicable. Very likely they would, if they considered it with due care as an abstract question, pronounce it impossible. But God’s complaint has been of old, “My people doth not consider.” And when some effort is made in this direction, there are difficulties in the way of reaching a correct conclusion. The flesh is against it, and unrighteousness is deceivable; the world is against it, and millions are deluded by the wickedness in which it lies and which governs its customs and fashions; and the devil is of course against it, and marshals all his hosts of lies for the maintenance of his kingdom of darkness and the enslavement of men under the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit exhorts us:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” Col. 3:5.6.

Natural reason suggests that if God is good He will surely not be so severe in judging what is manifestly the craving of our nature, and probably means only to warn us against those outbreaks of ungoverned passion which all the world pronounces shameful, which injure the subject’s health as well as his standing in the community, and which may eventually lead to the renunciation of all moral restraints and render him a castaway. In confirmation of this suggestion it is presumed that the condemnation of covetousness as idolatry is an exaggeration. The eye of such critics is not single, and squints in different directions, and the eye-salve of the Gospel is not promptly ap-

plied to remedy the evil. Thus the heart is divided, and but too many imagine that they can serve their own natural inclinations, which the Scriptures call the flesh, and at the same time serve God. This unfortunately applies even to many Christians, who are far from a conscious denial of Christ, but who in their lack of watchfulness and prayer put themselves into constant danger. When they go to worship they of course do not address their prayers and praises to mammon or make profession to engage in his service: they desire to worship God. When they go out into the world and take part in its employments and enjoyments, they do not go in mammon's name and ask his blessing upon their conduct. One who thus openly sins, with a full consciousness of what he is doing, would probably not have the hardihood to call himself a believer in Christ. They go through the forms of Christian worship, and attend to their business and pleasure without any pronounced manifestation of heathenism. It is therefore not surprising that they ask the question, How can their conduct be idolatry? Alas, they will not see, not having clarified eyes they cannot see, that if they do not serve God only, renouncing utterly the service of the world and the flesh and the devil, they are trying to serve two masters. And the effort is vain; for while they profess to be serving God and are themselves deceived in thinking that their devotion to mammon does not render an acceptable service of God impossible, they are really serving another master. We are bought with a price, and our Redeemer claims us wholly.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if Christ died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

The impossibility of serving two masters, and the necessity of renouncing every other master and consecrating ourselves wholly to God, who will not give His glory to another, and who commands us to serve Him with all our heart and Him only, is further set forth in the subsequent verses of Christ's sermon. We are required to have such implicit trust in God that we shall take no thought for the supply of our temporal wants, necessary as that supply is for our life and welfare on earth and great as are the incentives in our

nature to rivet our attention upon the things needed for our earthly subsistence, and, giving way to the delusive imagination of our carnal hearts, to strain every nerve by our supposed wisdom and power to obtain the necessities of life in ample measure.

1. God Wants Us To Trust Him

Verse 25 lays down the broad proposition which forbids our anxious concern about these earthly needs, because God has promised to provide and wants us to trust His fatherly care.

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”

We can not serve two masters: serve God alone, and confidently look to Him for the supply of every want that may arise while engaged in His service. Our Savior knew how directly this runs counter to our natural inclinations and all our worldly wisdom. He knew also how prone we are to wrest His words in favor of our self-conceited human providence, and to tone them down to a sense more acceptable to our reason, and He therefore repeats the words, that we may be sure that He meant what He said. It is a hard lesson to learn, and only the grace of our Lord can make us docile pupils; and when we are rendered willing to learn it, reducing it to practice causes us so much difficulty that we incur the danger of moderating and modifying the meaning by our interpretation in order to silence the voice of conscience which daily rebukes our little faith.

The words “take no thought” are the translation of a word signifying that anxiety of mind which we usually call care. When we imagine that our life and all that is necessary to preserve it and make it comfortable depends on our discretion and careful management as well as upon our diligence in the work which our hands find to do, we cannot escape troublous thoughts about our efforts and their success in accomplishing our plans. As long as we prosper according to our wishes: as long as our health is good and our business flourishes; as long as our barns are well filled and our purses are

well supplied, there may be little anxiety about what we shall eat and drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed, although even then we are not secure against the adversities which render the continuance of these treasures unreliable and excite fears as to what tomorrow may bring forth. But prosperity is not always ours. There is much to cause discouragement because plans have failed and discontent because success has not reached the measure of desire.

And when actual want seems threatening us, what then? Then troubles thicken if we have no better refuge than our own providence, and cares are ready to crush us. There is no remedy for such unrest but that which our Lord sets before, us in His lesson of trust in God.

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” Phil. 4:6.

As He has promised to provide we need to have no anxieties about the supply of our wants. That is His concern, and He will not fail to execute His gracious will. Trust His Word, “casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” 1 Pet. 5:7. It certainly is reasonable that we Christians should rid ourselves of our cares, which are as useless as they are vexatious, when the God whom we serve and who has promised to provide for His servants bids us only to ask and we shall receive, and teaches us confidently and joyfully to say:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Ps. 22:1.

2. Judge Intelligently

To overcome the shallow reasonings of our flesh, which lusts against the Spirit, Christ appeals to the sober reflection of His disciples, that under His tuition they may judge intelligently.

“Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment? 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 to his stature?”

With all man’s ingenuity he can neither increase his stature nor prolong his life. His waste of energy in this regard would be apparent, even if he did his utmost. He knows that he can increase his stature only according to God’s will and laws, and that he must die when his life has reached its divinely prescribed limit. And is it not sheer puerility to worry about the food needed to sustain life and the raiment needed to clothe the body, when God cares for the life which is more than food, and for the body which is more than raiment? God preserves our lives, assuredly will provide for the things which are necessary for that preservation. If He cares for the greater, He certainly will not neglect the less which is needed for the accomplishment of His will. Nor is there any rational ground for the thought that His providence is in some way dependent for its exercise or its efficiency upon our planning and devising and operating. The fowls of the air are fed, though they do not sow or reap or gather into barns. Can God not feed us just as well? He has assured us that He will; can He not fulfill His promise without the help of our wisdom or work? He has taught us to ask Him for our daily bread; why should we allow ourselves to be worried with anxious cares about it, as if the result of our asking must be dubious unless our petitions are buttressed by our own efforts to help ourselves? Why should we worry about tomorrow’s bread instead of asking it of God and cheerfully going on our way in the assurance of faith that He will provide?

“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 Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

This last question shows where the whole trouble lies, when we are tormented with cares and anxieties about the necessities of this earthly life. The logic is unanswerable on Christian grounds. If God cares for animals and plants and unfailingly supplies them with everything requisite for their preservation and the attainment of the end for which they were created, it would be unreasonable to suppose that He does not care for man, whose endowments are so much greater and whose place in the world is so much more important. Reason would presume that if God does not care for us and has not provided for the supply of our daily recurring wants, His purpose must be to let us die and thus effectually quash all thoughts about our future food and raiment. But His providence has never failed, and His Word makes us sure that it will never fail to furnish what His creatures need. It is man's faith that fails. O ye of little faith! That is the explanation of his carking care and cankerous, worry concerning what he shall eat and wherewithal he shall be clothed. People do not take God at His word and therefore they are needlessly troubled about many things. They do not believe, although many of them profess to believe the Scriptures, that:

“...the eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.” Ps. 145:15, 16.

Whatever words may be employed in the Bible to assure us that God provides for us all the necessities of life and that all our cares in this regard are superfluous, the secret thought still arises and exerts its evil influence, that something essential in the matter is left to our wisdom and strength, and that upon this all must ultimately depend. No true Christian will deny outright that God's good providence is over all His creatures and supplies their needs, but many evidently assume that this is meant with limitations which man's reason must suggest. This gives rise to doubts on the subject and leaves room for all cares and worries which arise from doubt and disbelief, and which so greatly afflict you, O ye of little faith!

“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; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

These words impress upon our minds the admonitions given before, and offer two additional reasons why we should heed and practice them. In the first place, it is heathenish to turn away from the promises of God and the command to lay our wants before Him in believing prayer, and to vex our souls with needless cares as to how our daily bread shall be procured: as if God never truly meant what He says and we could be on the safe side only by looking out for ourselves and putting our trust in our own provident plans and in our own strong arms. The heathens, who know not God and His precious promises, may in their blindness do such impious things. They have not the means of knowing better. But Christians have the light from heaven, and are themselves to be the light of the world. They know better, or at least are much to blame if, with all the means of heavenly knowledge at hand, they do not know better. For them it is a burning shame to walk in darkness as the benighted Gentiles walk. Those who distrust God in regard to His providence for the supply of their temporal needs should see to it that they are not also distrusting Him in regard to His grace for the salvation of their souls, for when His Word fails to make us sure as to the one, there is nothing to make us sure as to the other. In the second place, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” If you believe in Him, then trust His promises and cast your cares upon Him, for he careth for you. Christ has taught us to call Him our Father, and invites us to believe that by faith we are His true children. Our earthly fathers love us and under God look after their children’s welfare. If these have childlike hearts do they permit the thought to arise in them that it would be unsafe to trust their fathers’ care and as soon as reason dawns begin to nurse anxieties concerning their food and clothing? That is not their business. Their place and duty is to love and obey their parents and not interfere with the father’s management of his own affairs. They are unfilial children if they do not trust him. Much more reason have we to trust our heavenly Father, who is not subject to the infirmities of earthly fathers, which sometimes seem an excuse for the impiety of the children. He always has the power to fulfill the

promises of His love, and will resort to miracles now, as He has done in the past, if the ordinary provisions in nature should in any case be inadequate for such fulfillment. He is our Father and is Almighty: shall we not trust Him and be content? He may not give us wealth; He may not give us as much of this world's goods as our greedy hearts may desire. He has made no such promises. But He will give us what we need and as much as He knows to be for our good. Is not that enough? What thankless, unfilial hearts we have, if we say it is not, and in consequence pierce ourselves through with many sorrows by our covetousness and our vain worries and cares. That is one of the reasons why the Gospel does not have the desired effect on so many hearts. They hear the Word indeed, but it falls among thorns; and they "go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." Luke 8:16.

3. How It Harmonizes With All Scripture

An explanation follows, without which many might find it difficult to harmonize the lesson of this entire section with other teachings of the Holy Scripture.

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

It is not presupposed that all requisites for the cordial acceptance and cheerful performance of such demands lie dormant in our nature and only need arousing. The sermon on the mount is not based on such principles, and the kingdom of God which it proclaims not only does not recognize them, but requires their renunciation. They belong to the flesh which must be crucified if we would be followers of Christ. When we start from the right premises reason will indeed be capable of discerning the folly of man's natural thoughts about procuring and laying up in store the transitory things of the world, which God alone can give and which He bountifully bestows on all His creatures according to their needs. But finding the right premises and

acting upon the rational conclusions is a different matter. That is the province of faith, which is the gift of God, not a product of our own nature. Hence seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness is indispensable to the banishment of anxious thought concerning what we shall eat or what we shall drink or wherewithal we shall be clothed. Naturally we imagine that providing for these necessary things belongs to us, and that any failure to possess them in ample measure is our fault, and rightly brings dishonor upon us as well as the discomforts of want. Hence the common despising of the poor and the honoring of the rich. The Gentiles naturally struggle for earthly goods, and the natural light of the people living in civilized countries does not lift them above the inborn infirmities of their fallen nature, so that without the heavenly power of the Gospel they do not in this respect differ from the Gentiles. The common thought is that they must provide for themselves, and that of course the more they accumulate the better they are secured against want. So taking anxious thought about the morrow, they worry and work, and work and worry; and as the result of their efforts to safeguard themselves against any possible adversities is of course insufficient to satisfy their greed and their fears, they are always burdened with cares. The remedy for these foolish anxieties is found only in the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This must be sought first, not only because in a right estimate of values this is the most important and must have precedence, but also because the right attitude towards temporal things, as subordinate to the spiritual and eternal treasures, is dependent upon our faith in the great King, under whose dominion of grace all things are ours. When we have citizenship in that kingdom with its great spiritual immunities and privileges all other things shall be added unto us.

We enter the kingdom of God when we become disciples of Christ and believe in Him. This faith is first of all the apprehension of Him as our Savior and of His righteousness, so that we are justified by faith and have peace with God. There is no just ground for restricting the sense of the word righteousness to the personal holiness and godly living of Christ's disciples. It is undoubtedly true that the hearers of His sermon were not yet able to understand the full import of His obedience unto death to work out a perfect righteousness for us, which the Gospel should bring and faith should receive; but that is no reason for assuming that His words could mean no more for them and for us than they were then able to understand, although in the divine purpose the sincere believers should later be led into all truth.

What they were to seek first is the kingdom of God and His righteousness, which in the divine mind was the same then as now. Even to the children of God in later times, and down to our own day, there are many things pertaining to that kingdom which yet lie in the future and are not yet fully unfolded to our view. But we are to seek it still in all its fulness and in all its glory, laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven. "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," though the glory of them all surpasses our understanding. The righteousness through which by faith we have an assured hope of eternal blessedness, and in the appropriation of which we have peace on earth and glory in heaven, is the righteousness which our Savior acquired by fulfilling all the requirements which God makes upon us. It is His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. This was rendered for us and is now imputed to us by faith, without the deeds of the law. We thus become children of God, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit receive childlike hearts which trust their Father's Word and rely upon His promises, which they know to be yea and amen forever. It is thus that they are taught and brought to cast their cares upon God, who careth for us.

"Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." 1. Tim. 4:8.

Lest any reader should think that we are overlooking difficulties which seem grave to many minds, we repeat that the subject presents a lesson which is hard to learn. It does this not only because the command to take no thought for the goods of earth and for tomorrow's necessary bread conflicts with our natural sentiment and reason, but also because it seems to be inconsistent with divine teaching in other places of Holy Scripture. The reflection is not easily suppressed, that the banishment from our minds of all anxious cares for the supply of the necessaries of life for the present and the future would not only make all successful business impossible, but surely bring us to want. And this conclusion of our reason appears to be sustained by various passages of holy writ. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," the wise man admonishes; "consider her ways and be wise, which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest." Prov. 6:6-8. That commends itself to man's common sense.

The slothful man is warned that giving way to his indolence will bring him trouble.

“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man,” Prov. 24:33, 34.

The rebuke of the lazy and self-indulgent idler is just, and human judgments are usually of one accord in declaring that it serves such a fellow right when poverty and want overtake him. When our Lord miraculously fed the thousands who followed Him, “He said unto His disciples. Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” John 6:12. Thoughtful minds approve the good advice to save what is not needed today: it may be needed tomorrow. And St. Paul exhorts:

“That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” 1 Thess. 4:11, 12.

All this coincides with the dictates of reason and our human sense of right: must not the Christian conscience make account of it in reading the Lord’s lesson on a life of trust in God and freedom from vexing cares? Of course it must; and it does so most cheerfully, because it is intent upon knowing the mind of the Lord and doing the Master’s will. But it is all a mistake to presume that these texts conflict with Christ’s teaching and require us to take His words in another than their proper sense. If only all Christians, instead of endeavoring to make His doctrine harmonize with their natural reason and carnal sentiments and habits, which is indeed a difficult undertaking, would seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, there would not even seem to be an inconsistency in the statements and requirements. The texts cited only help us to understand better the teaching of our Lord. For they all teach us one and the same thing, that we cannot serve two masters, that God is absolutely Lord whom alone we must serve if we would be

Christians, that he cannot be a faithful servant who will not in all things trust this merciful and mighty Master, and that under Him in His kingdom our calling is to do His will, fulfilling our duties as His grace gives us ability, but not worrying about the results of our work, as if He had given the government and care of His kingdom into our hands. Even so far as our own immediate interests are concerned, our subsistence whilst we sojourn here and our blessedness hereafter, our concern is to do what He tells us and let Him provide and see that in the outcome His counsels are fulfilled and the purpose of His love is accomplished.

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.” 1 Pet. 5:6, 7.

God keeps the reins of government in His own hands. He saves us, we do not save ourselves. But He saves us in His gracious way, not according to our wisdom or whims. He tells us what to do to be saved. That we are to do, and trust that thus His end will be attained. To permit doubts to arise about the feasibility of His plan and the wisdom of His means to execute it, to give way to anxious cares about the soul's deliverance from sin and death and run hither and thither in wild and vain efforts to effect it according to the devices of nature and clamors of reason, and to declare it folly to accept as sufficient the simple words of our Lord in their plain and proper sense, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” is to frustrate the very purpose about whose accomplishment we entertain such vain anxiety and worry. Do what the Lord tells you, and leave the result to Him, rejoicing that He cares for you and will fulfill His promise. And so we have our place assigned and our duties laid upon us by the Lord whom we serve. To fill this place and do this work concerns us much; for it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful. To provide for what we shall eat and what we shall drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed, that is the Master's concern; for He has promised us our daily bread. To worry about that, instead of devoting our whole heart to the duties assigned us, is to meddle with matters for which we have no calling and for which we are not competent, and it can only result in rendering us unfaithful servants in our unfilial presumption.

When the sluggard who neglects the duties of his calling and comes to want because of his lazy violation of God's providential order, is referred to the ant for a lesson in providing in time of plenty for future dearth, that lesson is rendered ineffective by the assumption that it is in conflict with the teaching of the sermon on the mount. The ant is just as dependent upon God's care for its needs as the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, and it teaches the same lesson. It lets God care for its life and its food, and lays up according to the order of His providence what His bounty bestows, without a thought of meddling with His way of providing or a worry about its sufficiency or a tremor about the possibilities of its failure. Let the sluggard learn of the ant to do his work faithfully as God ordains, and let Him do the providing.

“Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” Ps. 37:3.

When we become citizens in the kingdom of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we renounce the devil and the world and the flesh. He permits us still to live a little while in this world, because He has something for us to do here. While He directs all the affairs of the universe and rules over all. He employs men and angels as His servants to execute His will. In His kingdom of nature and of grace He honors us with a place and a calling to render service. In this His people delight to engage, because it is their good Lord's pleasure and because they are useful on earth while they do His will. What shall we have for this service? If we ask such a question in a menial and mercenary spirit, relying upon our supposed merit and claiming a corresponding reward, we shall have nothing for it but the Master's rebuke. God owes us nothing, we owe Him everything. He will make no contract with us on commercial principles. But He is a bountiful Father who graciously dispenses wealth and blessing above all that we are able to ask or think. He delivers us from the slavish service of sin under the dominion of Satan, gives us life and salvation, and makes us heirs of glory in His kingdom, and this without any merit or worthiness of ours. But we must wait for the full enjoyment of our inheritance until we have fulfilled the purpose of our Father on earth. Meantime we are to be faithful in His service here, and occupy the place and do the work which He assigns us, trusting in Him for the supply

of our wants on earth as we trust in Him to lead us safely to our eternal home. He has provided for all this, and His provision is wise and good and effectual, working out securely and continually the purpose of His providence and grace. So we have the supply of our spiritual wants through the means of grace entrusted to the Church; and so ample arrangements are made in the powers of nature and the distribution of gifts and assignment of vocations for the supply of our temporal wants.

God's plan is not that all the members of His kingdom on earth should devote their entire time and talent to the immediate work of preserving and extending His Church with its riches of grace unto salvation. He has appointed a special ministry for this, without however dispensing a single member from rendering service according to his gift and station and opportunity; for whatever may be each one's secular calling, all have the vocation alike, as a chosen generation and a royal priesthood, "that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness to His marvelous light." 1 Pet. 2:9. With this heavenly calling the earthly vocation given in the providence of God does not interfere when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We serve Him when we perform the duties which He has assigned us in our homes and business, in our community and country, as well as when we perform our duties in the closet and in the Church. All these ordinances of God's providence and of His grace work harmoniously together as divine arrangements for the accomplishment of His good will on earth. This provides for all — for all needed service and for all needed supplies. One is a farmer, another is a mechanic, a third is a merchant. All are to serve God and thus under Him to serve one another. The farmer raises bread and meat, the mechanic makes clothing and builds houses, the merchant brings the produce to market for our convenience. All labor for the welfare of all, and all receive their wages. But none of them is the originator of the things in which service is rendered, none is lord of the lands and the goods, none has power over the results of his labor, and none has a right to do as he pleases in regard to working and using the proceeds. All are merely stewards, who work for God in their stations and calling, all are required to be faithful in doing the Lord's will, and all must render to Him an account of their stewardship. He cares for all and provides for all; no one need worry about the results. Only when men set up for themselves, refusing to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, does any conflict arise. But then it is not a conflict of one portion of Scripture with

another and one duty with another, but a conflict of the natural mind and the carnal heart with the government of God in His providence and grace; and then come discontent with the Master's apportionment of His goods to His servants, a greed for more than He deems it wise to give, a human provision that promises better profits, and a ceaseless anxiety and worry and care about the results.

But is it not true then that the Christian must work to secure daily bread; that he must save to have something over for possible adversities; and that he must accordingly take thought of these things and have many cares respecting them? The question manifests the confusion of a mind that would serve two masters. Yes, the Christian must work, if he would be faithful to the Master whom he professes to serve; he must save the fragments that remain, if he would escape the reproach of wasting his Lord's goods; but he must not presume that he is the Master whose wise providence supplies his wants and to whom the honor of it all is due. If he is a faithful servant, his labor and discretion will further the purpose of the Lord, and his service will of course be tributary to the end which God has in view. But it is God that supplies and distributes the necessaries of life. It is He that has given and preserves our powers of mind and body, shows us what He would have us to do, gives us strength to do it, and bestows His blessing to make it effective. Our part is that of the servant who obeys the Master's orders, without presuming to lay the plan of His government, or prescribe to Him the means and measures to make it effectual. Therefore it is not for us to harbor cares and anxieties about its success, nor to murmur and complain if the result is not what we expected and in our self-conceit thought we had a right to expect. Let God rule; cast your cares upon Him, for He careth for you; be content with what His wisdom gives you; then you shall not want. The Lord of course calls to labor, not to idleness. The work of each is made to fit in with the order by which God governs the world; and when each performs his part His good will is done and daily bread is supplied to all. Hence it is that when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness all other things are added unto us. He provides for that. Of us it is required that we be found faithful, which we cannot be if we stand all the day idle or waste our Lord's substance with luxurious living.

Probably if sin, had not come into the world the order of divine providence would be different; but as it is the decree is issued that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground." Gen. 3:19.

We cannot be dispensed from this, and we rebel against the Lord of all when we try to set His decree aside.

“When we were with you this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.” 2 Thess. 3:10-12.

We are not to infer from the law requiring us to work, that our violation of the law by our indolence would make God’s care for our earthly subsistence of none effect, as if, after all, the success of God’s providence is dependent on the part which is assigned to us in the execution of His plans. We must not flatter ourselves with the proud conceit that if we refuse to be obedient servants the whole counsel of the Master must fail. The sluggard will suffer for his unfaithfulness, and God may punish him even in this life by withholding His good gifts as well as by visiting other pains and penalties upon him; but the purpose of the Lord’s government will not be foiled by such sins, as it is not foiled by Satan’s work in other forms. God still provides the needed bread and gives it even to the wicked. That depends on His will, not on ours. Furthermore, when St. Paul exhorts that the idlers should work and eat his own bread, the implication is that by pursuing disorderly ways and being a busybody in other people’s affairs, instead of quietly minding his own business in the work assigned him, he eats the bread of others and becomes a worthless parasite in the community; for it is embraced in the divine order, by which the necessaries of life are secured to all creatures, that men in their relation to one another should respect the gifts and goods and opportunities bestowed on each, and that every one that is willing to work should eat his own bread as the fruit of his labor, and not, as a beggar or a thief, take that which the Lord apportions to another. But there could scarcely be a misunderstanding more thoroughly subversive of the sense of the words than that of taking them to teach reliance upon the merit of our work as establishing the claim, that the bread which we receive is our own over against God as well as over against men. In our commerce with our fellow stewards we earn our bread; in our relation to God we are all unprof-

itable servants, who have earned nothing and live only on the gifts of His bounty. The Lord calls us as laborers not because He needs our work and is willing to pay for it, but because He has blessings to bestow and wants us to share them. Frequently as the duty of labor is mentioned in the Scriptures, it is never urged on the ground that it is the essential factor in the plan of Providence to secure our daily bread. Always is this taught to be the free gift of God's goodness, of whom we are to ask it in prayer, without ever entertaining the thought that it is the product of our work and wisdom and care, and to whom we are to give thanks for it, without permitting the carnal feeling to arise that we have earned it and He owes it to us. As against our fellow men we can speak of earning our wages and claiming our dues and eating our own bread, but in our relation to God our duty is and our pleasure should be to do what He tells us, and our only legitimate care is to be found faithful in the service of a good Lord who does all the providing and assumes all the cares of His vast estate.

The same principle applies to our saving of surplus goods. Ordinarily God does not deal out the necessities of life according to the measure of each day's needs, though He teaches us to ask no more. When Christ miraculously fed thousands, there were fragments remaining, which He commanded His disciples to take up, not to cast away. In numerous cases we receive enough not only for today, but for many days, even for many years. That is according to His good pleasure, who provides for all and who makes even His temporal gifts tributary to the eternal purposes of His love. If He gives us more than we need today, of course He requires, as good stewards who must give account, not to waste the Lord's goods. But never is the motive urged that this will secure us against want in the future, or that the hoarding of wealth will make us happy in our independence of all resources but our own. The warnings against the love of money and the eagerness to get rich are so frequent and so insistent that Christians should banish all thought of laying up treasures on earth, and consider the duty of saving only a necessary element of the faithfulness which the Lord requires of His servants, that they may use the gift as He directs.

“Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” Eph. 4:28.

Hence to the believing mind all anxious cares and worries about the results of our plans and labors to supply the necessities of life, and the amount of our savings to have a good stock on hand for future emergencies, present themselves as infirmities of the flesh which are inconsistent with the life of trust required by our Lord, and which must be renounced. The true believer does not depend on himself for his daily bread, as he does not depend on himself for the salvation of his soul, although he knows right well the order of God requiring him to be faithful in his calling as regards the one and in the use of the means of grace as regards the other. And therefore he does not become the unhappy victim of vexing cares as to what he shall eat or what he shall drink or wherewithal he shall be clothed; for his plans and schemes to supply his wants may indeed fail, but his worry on that score comes only of his want of faith in God and is therefore a burden which sin imposes; and the ways of God, who does the providing, can never fail and his worry on that score would be utterly at fault and richly merit the rebuke, "O ye of little faith!" In either case the remedy lies in Christ's exhortation and promise:

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

If the steward strives to be faithful he will have no difficulty with the words of St. Paul, which are so often quoted in opposition to the doctrine here set forth. He says:

"If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."
1 Tim. 5:8.

It is an amazing exegesis of these words when anyone professing to be a disciple of Christ brings out as their sense, that a man does wrong when he minds his business and trusts in God for his and his family's daily bread, making known to Him his wants in humble prayer, confident that He will provide, and "casting all care upon Him, for He careth for us." The man

who idles his time away instead of doing the work of his calling, and wastes the substance which God gives him in riotous living, instead of applying it to the support of his family as God designs, is worse than an infidel, because even the natural impulses of humanity move the soul to relieve want when it is seen, especially in one's own household. Such a one is guilty of the double sin of failing to do the work assigned and squandering on his lust what was given him to provide, under God, for those of his own house. He is not a faithful servant. That is the root of his trouble.

In the lesson of trust which Christ gives, our faith is often put on severe trial. We do not say that an easy task is laid upon it, nor do we say that every sincere Christian has attained the life of trust. It is the ideal at which we are all aiming, and we must not cease to press toward the mark of our high calling, lamenting our shortcomings and praying fervently for more faith, that we may fully trust God's providence and grace for time and for eternity.

12. The Walk in Wisdom.

Matthew 7:1-11.

[In the portion] of Christ's sermon contained in the 7th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, there is no apparent connection between the various topics that would indicate their being designed as parts of a larger whole. They all throw light on the life in Christ's kingdom, and the verses 1-11 may be fitly considered as an exhortation to walk wisely in Christian love.

1. Judge Not

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 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.”

To understand these words correctly, some distinctions must evidently be made. There is a judging which is not only forbidden, but which is expressly commanded as necessary for the spiritual life and the prosperity of Christ's kingdom on earth. “He that is spiritual judgeth all things,” says St. Paul, 1 Cor. 2:1 The natural man can be no judge of the things revealed by the Holy Spirit, but “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” Ps. 25:14. We could not beware of

false prophets, as we are commanded to do, if we had not the right and the duty to judge whether they prophesy according to the Word of God.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1.

The Scriptures, which are given by inspiration of God, furnish us an unerring rule, and we must judge whether teachers conform to it. This is necessary for our protection against deceivers. “I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.” 1 Cor. 10:15.

But not only in regard to the doctrine which is preached are Christians to use their power of judging, testing by the Scriptures all that is taught as the Gospel, and thus abiding in the truth which makes them free. Necessity is often laid upon them to judge also the actions of their fellow men. When one makes statements which are in manifest conflict with known truth, we cannot but judge them to be false; and when one openly defrauds or defames his neighbor, we cannot but judge his deeds to be evil.

Both Church and state are required to examine and judge when accusations are made against members and citizens, and the duty is laid upon them to “judge righteous judgment.” If a brother trespasses and will not hear the admonitions and entreaties made in private to lead him to repentance, the command is given us to “tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican,” Matt. 18:17. The Church not only has the right to judge in the case, but has evidently the duty laid upon it in the interest of justice to the accused and of the welfare of the souls of all concerned. Therefore St. Paul rebukes those who would carry their differences before the civil magistrate instead of settling them among themselves.

“If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge Who are least esteemed in the Church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers.” 1 Cor. 6:4-6.

But as not all men are believers there must be civil rulers also, and they can discharge their office rightfully only when they are able and willing to judge between man and man. They must decide what can justly be demanded of citizens, and when charges of wrong-doing are brought against any of these, they must judge whether the accused are guilty, rightfully holding them innocent until guilt is proved. To these higher powers we must needs be subject, for they are ordained of God.

It is therefore manifest that we would entirely misunderstand our Lord’s words if we regarded them as forbidding all judgment with regard to the truth or falsity of doctrines proclaimed to the world, to the right or wrong of actions that become publicly known, or to the guilt or innocence of persons against whom charges are brought; for this would contradict plain words of Scripture.

What then is the import of our Lord’s words, “judge not?” There are two things plainly taught us in the Scriptures which will serve to lead us to the right answer. One is that the final judge of all is God alone, and that consequently man has no power and no right to judge of matters that pertain to the final judgment and the eternal testing of the judged, except so far as God has declared His judgment in His revealed Word. The other is that, as we cannot see into men’s hearts and are therefore incapable of reliable judgments as to the true spiritual condition of man, we never could, without usurping the prerogative of God, judge men’s hearts.

We may condemn what God condemns in the Scriptures. These are written for our learning, and the Spirit of God brings our souls into harmony with the will of God, so that we adopt the judgment which He pronounces. What conflicts with the truth which He has revealed we cannot but declare to be false, and what violates His commandments we cannot but pronounce sin, because the judgment of God has been made known to us in the premises, and as believing and obedient children we cordially adopt the

judgment. We therefore unhesitatingly judge that he who “abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God,” and that “if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.” But we cannot judge a doctrine to be false when it is not contrary to the Gospel, and we cannot judge an act to be sin when it is not in violation of the Divine Law. The reason is that God alone is Supreme Ruler and judge, and that no creature can have the power to determine what shall be the rule according to which souls are to be governed, and what is to be the decision in the final judgment. We must not presume to dictate to God what His judgment shall be on the last day, when the eternal destiny of all men is decided.

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him on the last day.” John 12:48.

It is always the arrogance of sin when men teach otherwise than God’s Word teaches, then proceed to pronounce judgment upon others, because they will not agree. Only God’s judgment is decisive. Judge not, but leave the judgment to Him who alone has authority and who judges righteous judgment.

But in applying the Word of God as the standard of all right judgment in spiritual and eternal things, our inability to read the hearts of others must not be overlooked. We can know that men err when their teaching is in conflict with what God teaches us in the Scriptures, and we can know that they sin when they transgress the holy law. But we cannot know whether the words spoken and the deeds done are the utterances of conscious rebellion against God and His Word, or are mistakes that are made without malice or even with good intention. There is many a slip of the tongue, or of the hand or foot, which is in conflict with the divine law, but which does not proceed from a wicked will. We cannot know this, unless the sin be of such a nature that it could not be committed without a repudiation of God’s Word. We cannot see the condition of the heart, and we sin when we pronounce judgment of condemnation on a person who is overtaken in a fault, without knowing whether he is inwardly guilty of death. In many cases the offender needs only to be shown his faults and repents when he sees it, having no design or desire to depart from the truth of the Gospel or to violate the right-

eousness of the law. Be charitable to your brethren, and do not by a rash judgment condemn them before you know them to be impenitent sinners whom the Lord condemns. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Gal. 6:1, 2.

The wisdom that is from above, guided by the love which always accompanies it, will not cease to own a brother as long as the hope may justly be entertained that in his heart he is a brother still, notwithstanding his faulty word or deed. All Christians need the exhortation to watch and pray that they may not in uncharitableness sin against their erring brethren, remembering that they live only by the mercy of God, and that they endanger their own souls by departing from that mercy. “For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again,” Such uncharitableness leads to false judgments and sinful actions in other respects. It is a beam in the eye, which disqualifies a person for rendering the assistance to his neighbor which love requires and only love can properly execute. It dims and distorts the moral vision. The mote in a brother’s eye may have only an imaginary existence, located there by the evil suspicions of the uncharitable observer who judges unrighteous judgment. Or if there is really a mote there, such an observer, having a beam in his own eye, is least capable of removing it. Lacking clear vision he wrongs his brother by magnifying the mote discovered in his eye. He gives offense by his false imputations, and thus excludes any influence for good that he might otherwise exert. His hypocrisy is manifest, and it makes him incompetent to help another to a better life.

“Thou hypocrite, first cast 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 lesson is of wide application in the life of individuals as well as in the discipline of the church. Uncharitableness in judging others cripples all pretended efforts to promote holy living and zealous work for the Master. The power to benefit them is lost when they perceive that faults are imputed to them of which they are conscious of being innocent, and that those which they are ready to acknowledge are exaggerated. A spirit is thus manifested which destroys confidence. And the evil is especially deplorable when brother falsely accuses brother and starts a process of church discipline with a violation of the fundamental law of love. Christians are not to be silent when a brother sins, as if it did not concern them, or as if it would be better to let him go on and perish in his sin than to incur the risk of disturbing the existing pleasant relation by endeavoring to correct his fault. Our Lord's command is:

“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Matt. 18:15.

He may refuse to hear, and the case may finally have to be brought before the congregation and may terminate in his expulsion from it, as an offender who refuses submission to the Word of God and thus forfeits all rights of Christian fellowship. But it must not be the fault of the person against whom the trespass was committed and who was obligated if possible to gain his brother. Every precaution that love can suggest must be taken to prevent the excitement of carnal feelings that would be a hindrance to success in affecting such gain. The effort must be strictly private, unless the offender himself insists on a course that compels publicity. “Tell him his fault between thee and him alone” is a rule designed to preserve his good name and standing. The public is to know nothing about it unless all the advances of love are repulsed.

“Ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.” Gal. 6:1.

The man who has the beam of uncharitableness in his own eye has not the spirit of meekness necessary to gain his brother. Only those who are spiritual can effectually appeal to an erring brother's conscience without awakening in him the repellant feeling that an attempt is made to triumph over him. The sincere Christian is mindful of his own weakness and liability to be tempted, and has no desire to be regarded as the offender's superior, knowing that only the grace of God sustains him and that he has nothing of which to boast. He wishes neither to humiliate his brother nor to exalt himself. Love is always tender in its treatment of those who are overtaken in a fault, hoping that they will repent of their wrong-doing as long as they do not themselves remove all reasonable ground of such hope by their refusal to hear the word of the Lord and their persistence in the sin which thus threatens their destruction.

2. Spiritual Severity

This does not imply that spiritual wisdom will never use severity, or cease to use soft words and conciliatory measures in dealing with those that sin. In the instructions which Christ gives for the exercise of church discipline He tells us that those who will not hear when they are privately admonished in the spirit of meekness with a view to their restoration, and still refuse to hear when this is repeated before witnesses and again before the church, must finally be regarded as heathen men and publicans whom we must cease to fellowship. If they will not renounce their sin, the faithful disciples of Christ must renounce them. It is this principle that Christ expresses in the words:

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

There are people who are as savage as dogs and as filthy as swine, and who, when the pearls of the Gospel are spread before them, trample them under their feet and persecute those who brought them. Hence the command was given to the apostle:

“Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you. It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”
Matt. 10:14, 15.

That injunction was strictly observed by the ambassadors of Christ, as we read in Acts 13:45, 46:

“When the Jews saw the multitudes they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken unto you, but seeing that ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

The apostle expresses the same principle in his instructions to Titus:

“A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” Tit. 3:10, 11.

The rule thus laid down is one not only of wisdom, but also of righteousness. It might not seem prudent to rebuke sharply, or to condemn and turn away from those who treat the Word of God with scorn when it is offered them, because seemingly that would block all further efforts to convert them. But when that stage of resistance to the Word of God is reached, in which the sinner is resolved not to hear or heed it, a wrong is done when any further attempts are made to enforce it. He must not be coerced, supposing this possible, and he must not by trickery be apparently won for that which he scorns. He can have access to God in no other way than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore only false prophets could ostensibly

lead him into the kingdom of God in spite of his declaration that he does not believe in Christ, and has no use for that which is preached in His name as the eternal truth of God. If such a person were lured or inveigled into the church, an element of trouble would be introduced and the salvation of many souls imperiled, without bringing the supposititious convert any nearer to the Savior. When a man not only persistently declines to accept the truth in Jesus, but declares himself unwilling to be further molested by its preachers, all devices and schemes to gain his influence for a cause which he despises are a delusion that exert a deadly power. And a personal wrong is done to the recalcitrant scorner by persisting in attempts to bring him unto the Lord's fold, when he has declared his unwillingness to enter it, or to heed any more appeals looking to the accomplishment of this end. It is virtually a persecution of the determined enemy of the cross of Christ. For in the economy of salvation respect is had for the original endowment of man with a personal will of his own. If he were wise he would submit this will to the will of his Maker, because only thus can he attain the end of his creation and be happy here and hereafter. But he must not be forced into the kingdom, and having resisted the call of God and refused to hear it any further, he has a right to be let alone. The grace of our Lord compels no one: the truth makes us free from the bondage in which sin holds the soul, but its work would be suicidal if it designed to secure liberty by denying its rights and ultimately crushing the will. The unbeliever's human right to choose must be respected, much as the Christian teacher deplors the unhappy choice which is made in the rejection of the Gospel. On the other hand, believers have the right and the duty to take cognizance of the facts as they exist, and accordingly to turn away from the stubborn unbelievers who act like dogs and swine, preferring their beastliness and filth to the heavenly life and happiness of the children of God. That which is holy must not be given to the dogs and pearls must not be cast before swine.

Much injury is done to the Church by the failure of Christian people, and especially of pastors, to obey these instructions of our Lord. Some think themselves wiser and more charitable than their divine Master, and accordingly deem sharp rebuke and refusal to fellowship inconsistent with the love which is due to our fellowmen. Their thought is that differences in regard to faith should be treated in the same way as differences on secular subjects, that have no bearing on the spiritual life and that are to be decided by human reason. The religious convictions which inwardly separate men do not

necessarily require separation in matters that are not religious. We can be citizens of the same country, and do business and join in social functions with each other, notwithstanding our religious differences. We can plant and reap, buy and sell, work and play together, though our beliefs in regard to revealed truth be not the same. For the purposes of social intercourse there is no necessity for making inquiries into the religion of the person concerned, except so far as this may be implied in the warning that “evil communications corrupt good manners.” But in matters of Christian fellowship in the Church the confession of the pure faith of the Gospel is paramount, and the rejection of Christ and His Gospel is necessarily a bar to fellowship. We may live in the same civil community with them and be good neighbors, but we cannot commune with each other in the same church when we are not of the same mind in regard to the faith whose confession forms the very ground of our association as a church.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. 2 Cor. 6:14-17.

3. Sustaining Grace Always Needed

In his endeavors to gain erring brethren and in his refusal to have religious association with those who reject the truth in Jesus and become manifest as dogs and swine, the Christian daily needs the sustaining grace of his Lord, as he does in every duty and every trial, and his recourse will be to prayer for help. He does not walk wisely if he neglects this; and Christ instructs us and encourages us in its use.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 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? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask Him?”

The subject of prayer had already been presented in an earlier portion of Christ's sermon. The Pharisaic abuses connected with it had been rebuked and warned against, and the beautiful Lord's Prayer had been given as a model for our guidance. The need and habitual practice of prayer was there presupposed. Now the duty and privilege is urged as an inner necessity for the supply of our ever recurring wants, which are felt the more deeply the longer our conflict with the devil and the world and the flesh continues. Without Christ we can do nothing. The Holy Spirit has made us conscious of our disability and helplessness, and has enabled us by faith to flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. He has made us recipients of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation which it conveys. But this very grace has made it more and more plain to us that of ourselves we can do nothing, and that our help is in the name of the Lord. Therefore he constantly uses the means of grace, through which his spiritual life is daily renewed and his faith replenished, and he keeps in close communion with His gracious Lord in earnest prayer, in which he continues without ceasing. The true Christian cannot live without it, because God is his refuge and strength; and he would not know whither to flee or where to find help if he were not sure that God will hear him when he cries and help him when he calls.

“As the hart panteth after water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.” Ps. 42:1.

The blessedness of prayer has not been realized and duly appreciated as long as it is regarded only as a command to be obeyed and a duty to be per-

formed. It certainly is this; but contemplating it only as such leads to the Pharisaic formalism and hollowness which make our prayers mere works of the law and deprive us of its blessing. Prayers that are offered from fear of punishment for disobeying the command, or from the mercenary hope of reward for the obedience imagined to be meritorious, are not such as Christ commands and obtain the promise. They with their erring notions have no place in truly believing hearts. These long for communion with God, who is their comfort and joy and a very present help in trouble. Their great motive to prayer is their access to God by faith in Christ Jesus, who has called them into His kingdom and promised to hear their prayers, who is able and always willing to bestow grace and every blessing to all that ask in faith, and who will in no wise cast out the helpless and forsaken.

“Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live.” Ps. 116:2.

We do not mean to say that all true believers are at all times fervent in spirit and instant in prayer, and that they never become languid and cold in their devotion and zeal. All Christian experience refutes such a claim. The admonitions given in the words under consideration show that such are needed, and they are designed to encourage us in the use of our privilege. All believers have the flesh to contend against in this as in every other activity of the spiritual life; and all have seasons of depression when they are disinclined to converse with God and when, if they do overcome the resistance of the flesh, their prayers lack fervency. It is well in such cases to remember our duty and to insist that it shall be done, in spite of the repugnancy of the sin that is still in us and that lusts against the Spirit. The prayer will then be wanting in an element which properly belongs to it; but it will be a great benefit to the Christian that he has maintained his ground as a child of God, though imperfectly. His resistance of sin and Satan will induce the enemy to flee from him, and his prayer will again become fervent.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.”
Jas. 4:7, 8.

What we desire to point out and to impress upon the readers' minds is the important lesson, that the Christian life is one of communion with God and that it involves the need and desire of prayer, so that faith in Christ unto salvation cannot exist in conscious souls without feeling the need of seeking God's help and believing that it will be granted when our requests are made known to Him. A believer does not at once cease to be such when times of coldness and languor set in and prayer becomes a burden instead of a glorious privilege. No doubt it must be said of some true Christians, not only of hypocrites:

“Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.” Jas. 4:2, 3.

But that is in seasons of trial and temptation; and such a condition could not become permanent without involving the fall from grace, and must therefore emphasize to our minds the admonition to stand fast that no man take our crown. The grace of God will be sufficient for us, if we only trust in Jesus, through whom the victory is assured to faith. But “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

The privilege and the promise of prayer are dependent on the atonement and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. This must not be overlooked. Without Him we could not be permitted to approach God's holy throne, nor could our hearts be fitted to offer acceptable prayers.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Rom. 5:1, 2.

The promise that we shall be heard is given to them that believe. No assurance is given us that when we ask for gifts which we design to spend upon our lusts, we shall receive them. Granting such a prayer would be no blessing. But so ample are the promises that some limitation is expected, and surprise is sometimes felt that none is expressed in immediate connection

with them. "Ask and ye shall receive." No condition is appended, no reservation is made. But it is the children of God who are exhorted to pray, and to whom the promise is given that they shall receive. These are the believers in Christ.

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." John 1:12.

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:26.

That the promise is given to believers is frequently expressed, and is always implied when not explicitly stated, because there is no other name by which we could have access to God and obtain spiritual blessings but that of the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

"All things whatsoever ye ask, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. 21:22.

"Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you." John 16:23.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16.

This makes it clear also why the Christian can pray with full confidence of being heard, without being disturbed by the doubts and difficulties which reason interposes. The Holy Spirit has brought the believing heart into harmony with the mind of Christ and directs it by His Word, so that he has consciously no will that contravenes the will of God, and always purposes that the will of God should be done, though his words should occasionally include particulars which the wisdom and mercy of God interprets and ap-

parently eliminates. Thus it may seem that a prayer is not heard when in fact it is granted in fuller measure than we conceived it, although in a different form. We should therefore banish from our minds all thoughts of modifying the words of Jesus and accepting them only with allowance for their supposed exaggeration. This would be heeding the suggestions of the flesh in opposition to the Spirit, and depriving ourselves of much of the encouragement given to perseverance in prayer and of the comfort which the constant exercise of the privilege gives. Earthly fathers give their children the bread for which they ask, not in mockery substituting a stone for it, or giving a serpent for the fish desired.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”

Christians would not walk wisely if they neglected the admonition to ask, that they might receive the good things promised and so much needed; and they just as certainly would not do wisely if, trusting in themselves and having no spiritual blessings because they ask not, they withheld from the Giver of all good the honor which is due.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Eph. 3:20, 21.

Having entered the kingdom of God and embraced His righteousness which is by faith, the child of God seeks not earthly things, which pass away, but those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. That will lead him to be a true servant of the Lord and a blessing to his fellowmen. While he walks humbly before God and strives to perform faithfully the duties of his calling, his labor of love will praise the Master and profit his neighbor. The faith which clings to the Savior is confessed before men for the glory of His name, and the love by which it works for the wel-

fare of others render him useful here on earth, and while he thus looks to the saving of his soul he is a light for the world that leads to the salvation of others for whom Christ died. Thus he administers wisely the gifts committed to him, according to the apostle's admonition:

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” Eph. 5:15-17.

13. The Golden Rule. Matthew 7:12.

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 GENERALLY CALLED the golden rule, which all the world admires. Even those who do not appreciate Christianity in its spiritual power unto salvation, find it worthy of all acceptation and commend it as a clear and compact guide for all who desire to lead an upright life. Some have indeed endeavored to show that the golden rule is not peculiar to the Christian religion and did not originate in the teaching of Christ. Whether this was done to disparage Christianity and deprive it of the glory which is presumed to be reflected by the rule upon the Church, it is not important to inquire. The sermon on the mount unquestionably sets it in a light which neither Judaism nor Paganism could shed upon it, and which gives it a distinctively Christian character, though it is not this which has elicited all the world's admiration. In a negative form, that we should not do to others what we would not have them do us, the rule was enunciated before the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; but that form, which implies the existence of sin in the human soul and the possibility of resisting its impulse to action and of preventing the evil deed, is far different from the positive form which our Lord gives it, and which presupposes righteous motives issuing in righteous acts. It is this positive character given it in Christ's teaching that makes it really the golden rule which Christianity sets forth and which no other religion has inculcated. It presents a practical test for the exercise of the love which is the fulfillment of the law, and to which the teachings of the prophets lead, both as to what is to be done and as to the spirit in which it is to be done in order to please God. But it is important to remark that, while it is a compact rule for the application of the inner Christian life to the external conduct, it

does not furnish that life and does not make us Christians and qualify us for its right application. Our Lord's words added to the rule, "for this is the law and the prophets," should be to us a safeguard against the superficial interpretations which are so much in vogue, but which tend to render it nugatory as a moral guide according to the mind of Christ.

The frequent appeals made to the golden rule in the interest of naturalistic humanitarianism, as if it presented to human reason a norm of right conduct under all conditions and circumstances, and as if compliance with it constituted the essence of all Christian life, show the necessity of a closer and more mature consideration of its import. Prevailing errors on the subject are misleading and mischievous. Or is it really so that Christ meant everybody, saint and sinner, devout people and lewd fellows of the baser sort, to be a supreme law unto himself, so that whatever he wants done to himself must therefore be right, and accordingly a safe guide to right in his conduct toward others? Let us endeavor to understand the rule with its implications in the light of Christ's teaching.

We should love our neighbors as ourselves. Put yourself in his place, then decide what you would do towards your neighbor in any given case. The rule seems simple and of easy application. You love yourself, and therefore wish yourself no ill, but every good. Love your neighbor in the same way and therefore entertain the same good wishes toward him. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, but always seeks his welfare. That is what you should do, and if you follow the golden rule, that is what you will do. Your acts will correspond to your sentiment, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, the regulative will be love. It all seems simple and easy as a rule determining right conduct towards our fellow men. That which in our love for ourselves we wish others to do to us, that is the thing which in our equal love for others we are to do to them. It is the Christian's ideal: perfect love to God and man, which is the fulfilling of the law in the bond of perfectness. It works all right when the right conditions exist. The man who has the same mind which was also in Christ Jesus finds no difficulty in deciding what he ought to do under any circumstances: show them the same love which you would have them show in their conduct towards you. It is a good rule of Christian life in our intercourse with our fellow men, serving as a directory for the exercise of Christian wisdom in cases of difficulty that may arise.

We have not said, and do not mean, that the Christian ideal presented in the golden rule is always realized in the conduct of Christian believers. They do possess a love which they have not by nature, and their faith worketh by that love. But this does not imply that the sin which has corrupted all human nature has been entirely eradicated, and that the selfishness of sin no longer effects them when they by faith have put on Christ. They are sinners whose sin is forgiven, and who, being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They are therefore not, as some misconceive or imagine to their own injury, people whose nature has become sinless and who in consequence of this inherent holiness lead perfectly sinless lives instinctively, with no impulse and no allurements to wrong-doing. They are perfect through God's gracious imputation to them of the righteousness which Christ acquired for all men and which they have appropriated by faith, not through any righteousness of their own. When they think of the account to be rendered to God of themselves and their deeds, they trust for their peace and comfort in the merits of the Savior alone, without a thought that their own fulfillment of the law could constitute a merit which would render Christ's merit superfluous for their justification. In that aspect of the Christian's life and destiny he is nothing and Christ is all.

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Phil. 3:8, 9.

For our salvation nothing avails but the blood of Christ, which cleanseth us from all sin and to which no love or righteousness of ours can add any virtue.

But the grace which works faith in Christ unto justification, so that there is no condemnation to them that believe, also purifies the heart, so that believers hate sin and love righteousness.

“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so also we should walk in newness of life.” Rom. 6:2, 3.

The Holy Spirit, who is given us through the means of grace, by which we are made believers, provides for our deliverance from the bondage of sin and selfishness and for our uplifting into a life of holiness and love.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.” 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

It is the design of God that those who receive the Savior should be restored to the purity and liberty of which sin had deprived them, and that being saved from death through the obedience of Christ they should glorify His name by living a life of holiness and blessedness under Him in His kingdom. To this end the Holy Spirit dwells in them and unceasingly does His purifying work in their hearts.

“If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Jesus from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8:11-14.

The Christian has then that within him which makes the application of the golden rule practicable. Love, which is the bond of perfectness, rules in his heart. Not that it has done its perfect work as soon as the faith is wrought which embraces the Savior with His perfect righteousness. The believing soul is justified by this faith, and ready to stand at any moment before the judgment bar of Christ, in whose perfect merits he is clad, though he has no righteousness or merit of his own. But his flesh still clings to him and hinders the Spirit's sanctifying work, so that perfection of love is reached only when the conflict with sin is ended in death. Meantime the believer never loses sight of the love which is the fulfilling of the law, as the ideal which he strives to realize. By reason of the sin in his nature which, instigated by Satan and allured by the world, ever lusts against the Spirit and struggles for the mastery, he is conscious that he comes short of its realization. The consequence is that he daily takes refuge anew in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins and his peace with God, and daily by the power of the Holy Spirit renews the struggle against the sin that is in him and around him, and the endeavor to walk worthy of his high calling. Hence the Scriptures admonish us:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Heb. 7:1.

The rule is thus well adapted to the character of Christian believers, and accords with the vocation which they have received as free subjects of Christ in His kingdom of grace here and glory hereafter. They have a good standard by which to judge what ought to be done. Not only have they the law and the prophets to direct them, but they have the love to incite them to do what God has shown by the law and the prophets to be His holy will. The Holy Spirit who gave the revelation of righteousness, and the Holy Spirit who dwells in their hearts by faith, is one and the same. That Spirit always moves them in the way of love and holiness which the Word given by revelation prescribes. Therefore when our Lord tells us, “Whatsoever things ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” the implication is that His disciples expect love from all the brethren and should be ever ready

to extend the same love to them. What Christians desire is that all should love each other and make this manifest in their conduct towards each other.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”
1 John 3:14.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.” 1 John 4:1, 2.”

The children of God love one another, and therefore would have all do to them what love requires, and are willing to do the same to them.

The golden rule is thus plainly practicable among true Christians. But it will not therefore serve as an unfailing regulative for righteousness to all men, whether Christians or not. It is designed for those who believe, and will not be a reliable guide for right living to mankind in general. The reason is obvious. It assumes the existence of a right standard in the minds of those who would regulate their lives by it. But this does not exist in all men; for not all desire that the will of God should be done, which alone unfailingly points out the path of righteousness and leads in the way of love. We should do unto others what we would have them do to us, provided that what we would have them do to us accords with the instructions which our Lord has given us and the love which He would have to reign in our hearts. If we have no such right will and loving motive, the application of the rule may lead to the very iniquities of selfishness which Christ designed to avert. If a man desires that others should lie and cheat for his benefit, manifestly the rule under his manipulation would require him to lie and cheat for the benefit of others. When one wants others to aid him in the execution of his selfish purpose and to abet the sinful schemes by which it is to be accomplished, he must, if he would comply with the rule, engage in the same iniquitous business to serve them. The rule works well when good men apply it; if a man is governed by selfishness, its application will result in selfish deeds.

Human nature does not furnish a standard of morals which could secure right conduct. The assumption that it does, and that all that is necessary for the maintenance of justice and charity in the lives of men is to live up to this standard, is radically false, because it makes no account of the corruption and disablement of that nature by the fall of man and the introduction of sin. It is the obstinate refusal to recognize the universal fact of sin in the world that renders so much of our educational work a failure.

The original constitution of man contained such a standard. We are assured of this by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is our only source of knowledge concerning man before his fall. This tells us that he was created in the image of God and that his Maker pronounced him good. But it was not long until, according to the same testimony, the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. How this came about is told us in the third chapter of Genesis. Satan entered Paradise and wrought the ruin of our race.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

In his original integrity the impulses of man's heart were in conformity with the righteousness and holiness which constituted the image of God, in which he was made. If this had continued to be the motive power of his moral nature, his desires and volitions would have been according to the will of his holy Maker, and whatsoever he would that men should do to him he would have done to them. And this would have been right and good, because the love of God reigned in his heart and was the moving principle of all his actions in thought and word and deed. He had the standard of right in his own spiritual life and endowment. There was nothing sinful in his nature, and whatever limitations may be predicated of his rational powers as a creature made for the service of the Creator, in whose holy will he found all his blessedness, their activity was all in the realm of righteousness and love. Until his apostasy his desires and volitions, his thoughts and imaginings were all good, because in harmony with God's, in whose image he was made. If the fall had not intervened, the golden rule would have been a trustworthy regulative of holy living, as what was desired of others was always that which accorded with the will of God. But it is not so now. Satan,

the foe of God and man, insinuated his nefarious work, sin was introduced, and man fell from God into the bondage of corruption. As a consequence the effective application of the golden rule is conditioned upon the restoration of the divine image, through the introduction of the new life which came to us in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The change which was effected in the nature of man by the intrusion of sin did not change his original essence or destiny. God made him good, and he became bad; but he was man still, and God held him still to be good. This implies that His good law remained obligatory upon His fallen creature, and was not changed to adapt it to his sinful condition, in which obedience to righteousness no longer lay in his power. Having become a corrupt tree, he brought forth corrupt fruit, while God still required righteousness, in which and for which he was created. But it means more than this. His nature was not so changed that the holiness and righteousness, which he possessed as the image of his Creator, could no longer be felt as an obligation resting upon him. He was man still, and notwithstanding his disabilities, which he suffered by his own fault, his mission and duty was to quit himself as man. God provided that he should know this, and therefore gave him the law of righteousness in written commandments, that he might read them and have something better than the impulses of his fallen nature to guide him. And in his soul an element remained that rendered it impossible for him to renounce this holy law as a foreign imposition which had no relevancy to his moral constitution and his mission in the world. He could not cast it off and have peace in its renunciation as an alien mandate which presented an ideal plainly beyond his reach.

He felt its obligation as presenting a goal for the attainment of which he was created, and without which his life would be a complete failure. His soul was not at rest, and nothing within him or about him could give him rest. This has been his condition ever since, and his condition in all the world now. Not all, probably but few, understand what is the matter, but the fact is one of universal experience, whatever may be the varied interpretations put upon it, and whatever may be the devices which the human mind has put forth in the hope of remedying the evil.

The element remaining in our nature that brings the obligatoriness of righteousness to our view is usually called conscience. This is not the place to enter upon an extended discussion of the confessedly difficult subject which the word presents; but there are several points which must be kept in

view for our present purpose. The human mind is not in its natural depravity capable of knowing, from its own resources, what righteousness and love to man requires and can therefore not devise a perfect law of holiness. Hence when man had fallen the divine law, which had been a light shining in his heart to guide him aright, was written on tables of stone, that he might read it and thus know the will of God, though now, since his heart was no longer in harmony with that will, its principal function, because of existing conditions, would naturally be to work a knowledge of sin. But notwithstanding the depravity which the law condemns, and notwithstanding the terror which the law inspires and the resentment which it arouses in the guilty soul, man cannot rid himself of the feeling that it is right and that it ought to be obeyed. Conscience thus testifies against men in their sinfulness, and in the consciousness the unique phenomenon is presented of a subject whose faculties are all under the bondage of sin, whose thoughts and affections are all active in the service of sin, but who yet recognize the obligation of the righteousness which the law demands, who feels that he ought to obey it, and who by no expedient is able to divest himself of the unrest which results from the conflicting elements in his nature. He has gone wrong and does wrong, but his conscience sanctions the right and can by no ingenuity of his reason be made to sanction the wrong, unless he succeeds in deceiving himself into the precarious belief that wrong is right. Conscience thus protects man from becoming a devil, and establishes the possibility of his restoration, by a new creation in Christ Jesus, to his original condition of holiness. But it cannot itself restore him. Sanctioning the right and doing the right are far from being the same thing. It always approves the right when the mind knows it, but it does not even secure the knowledge of righteousness, much less its performance, as the morality, theoretical and practical, of peoples without a supernatural revelation amply and painfully shows. Hence notwithstanding the power of conscience man has not in himself a standard which could under all circumstances secure right actions. The very fact that men, in their endeavor to justify or excuse their wrongdoing by a process of self-deception, in which the wrong is made to appear right, shows such an assumption to be groundless.

If therefore the natural man would consent to adopt as the regulation of his life the precept, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," considerate conduct could be expected on a selfish basis, but not the unselfishness and self-sacrifice involved in the law of love

which is the bond of perfectness. Not even the summit of civil righteousness would be reached. Prudential consideration would lead to a policy of rectitude, so far as appearances are concerned, but would not prevent the doing of wrong when selfish motives suggested it and reason concluded that doing it would furnish the higher gratification, notwithstanding the drawbacks and dangers. That kindly impulses of humanity, such as lie in our nature though fallen, would continue to be exercised and their frequency enhanced by the application of the precept is not disputed; but the rule cannot protect the corrupt heart against the power of sin which urges the wrong when the right costs too much. The golden rule, like all other forms of law, can direct our course along the line of righteousness when our inclinations are right, but can never set the heart right. No law can do that. If a workman is disposed to do the honest work that is expected of him, the consideration that he would wish this to be done for him if he were the employer, will no doubt fortify him to resist sporadic temptations to slight it; but if he has no such governing purpose, the rule will not prevent him from resorting to "tricks of the trade" in furtherance of his own selfish desire to make the most that he can for his personal advantage. And not only has the rule no power to better the man who adopts it, but its application may even result in doing wrong. For when work has been slighted the workman might wish that if he were the employer the defect should be concealed, lest his business should be injured, and he accordingly hides the fault. A dishonest man may wish to receive money in exchange for his influence in promoting a cause that is profitable, though bad, and proceed to bribe legislators and judges on the principle of doing to others what he would wish them to do to him.

The golden rule is an excellent guide for good men. But it makes no man good.

"If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given them that believe." Gal. 3:21, 22.

The law shows us what, according to the mission and endowment given to man, we ought to be and to do in order to accomplish the end of our cre-

ation; but since the fall, on account of which we are dead in trespasses and sins and children of wrath by nature, its chief work is to show us our sinfulness and our disability, and thus prepare us for the salvation effected by the Savior and graciously offered by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:3, 4.

Jesus expounded the law in His sermon on the mount, but even when He, the greatest of all teachers, preached it, it was powerless to sanctify and save the souls whom it condemned because of their transgressions, and its chief work continued to be the exposure of our sin and helplessness, while His glorious work was to fulfill all righteousness in our stead and effect our deliverance by His redeeming grace.

“Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 3:19-24.

When faith has embraced the great salvation in Christ and thus the heart has been renewed, the golden rule will be an excellent guide of conduct in a life actuated by love. Without such renewal through the grace of our Savior it not only cannot bring about the righteousness which the law demands, but

may even be abused in the service of sin by the acceptance of a norm that is nothing more than a dictate of the flesh. Only when we have the grace to wish that others would do right to us can such wish be a good rule to direct us in our action towards them; otherwise, by reason of the depravity of our nature, the dominating power will always be the selfish motives of the flesh as against the law of love which requires self-denial.

Put yourself in his place and then judge what you would like to have your neighbor do to you is emphatically a good plan to ascertain what in existing circumstances you should do to him, provided you have the love in your heart that wishes no wrong to your neighbor. You owe him money and have no thought of defrauding him. You mean to pay him as an honest man should. But he is needy, and it is not convenient to pay him just now, neither does the law require that you should discharge the debt today. Your interest is to defer the payment to a more convenient season. You have a legal right to do this, and it is easy in such a case to persuade yourself that you have also a moral right. Righteousness seems not to be violated by deferring what there is no intention or even desire to neglect. But what does love, which is the fulfilling of the law, require in the matter? Apply the golden rule and the answer will be at hand: Do to him as you would wish him to do to you. It makes no new law: it merely directs attention to that which is the essence of all divine law and sets in motion the powers with which the Christian is endowed when his heart is purified by faith. You wish that he would discharge his obligation to you now, when you are in distress, though it may involve a sacrifice: that is what Christian love would prompt you to do to him.

This is the law and the prophets, but not the instinctive expression of the natural man. The sermon on the mount sets forth the law of God and its fulfillment in a righteousness that is better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees; and the golden rule can be rightly understood and practiced only on the principles which Christ enumerates, who came not to destroy, but to fulfill the law. By faith the righteousness which He acquired for men by His vicarious obedience unto death is appropriated, so that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, and by faith their hearts are purified, so that like their Savior they delight to do God's will. Such children of God obtain a clearer consciousness of what is implied in the love which they always desire to exercise towards their fellow men, when they consider what they wish that these should do towards them. The golden rule thus

serves as an interpreter of the love that reigns in their hearts and a guide for its proper exercise. But the assumption that all would be good and lovely if only all men could be persuaded to adopt it as a norm of their conduct, is a delusion which comes of disregarding the fundamental requirement of Christian living, that man must be born again. Without Christ we can do nothing. The efforts to glorify sinful humanity by leading men to exalt their own powers and trust in them are not in accord with the law and the prophets.

14. The Narrow Way. Matthew 7:13-14.

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."

Something more than our nature furnishes is necessary to escape the condemnation which sin has brought upon us, and to walk in righteousness and true holiness according to our Maker's will. If we follow the instincts of our own hearts, our lives will not accord with the requirements of God's holy will; for "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Matt. 15:20. Unless a better righteousness is attained than that which can be developed from our corrupt nature, we must die in our sins. Our Lord shows what is requisite under the figure of two ways, between which a choice is to be made. One of these is entered by a strait or narrow gate leading into a narrow path, which issues in eternal life, but on which comparatively few are found walking, although the grace of God would by the Gospel enable all to choose it and walk in it. The other is a broad road, with a wide gate of entrance, which leads to destruction, and on which multitudes are traveling to a dreadful doom, although God by His holy law earnestly warns against it. Dropping the figure, we are thus taught that we must enter the kingdom of God if we would have eternal life, and that if we decline to do this we shall go with the multitude to the everlasting death which is the wages of sin.

It is marvelous that the many should choose the wide gate and the broad road to death, and that only the few should make choice of the strait and narrow way that leads to life. But we cease to wonder when we study the Scriptures and apply our hearts unto wisdom. It is what we must expect of a

people who, because of their blindness in sin, professing to be wise have become fools. For when the fall had taken place,

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6:5.

All men are now born in sin and ushered into a world of sin. It is man’s native element, and the wide gate and broad road are his natural choice. Death reigns, and only those live whom God rescues by His grace.

“You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: in whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Eph. 2:1-3.

The condition of our fallen race is thus plainly described. There is no spiritual life in man; the whole world lieth in wickedness, under the dominion of Satan, the prince of the power of the air; the moving principle in human hearts is the flesh with its affections and lusts; the walk and conversation of all men is therefore according to the course of this world; and as a result of the apostasy of a creature whom God had made good and endowed with godlike gifts, all became children of wrath by nature. That in this forlorn state the multitude should choose the broad road that leads to death, does not seem so marvelous after all, seeing that it is but natural.

The situation is not changed when we reflect that man, in the depth of his soul, does not prefer death to life, and never thinks of choosing misery rather than happiness. We may infer from this fact that he will not of two alternatives choose that which he knows to be the one which will bring wretchedness upon him in time and in eternity. He does not delight in pain and woe, but shuns it and endeavors to escape it. His efforts are directed to

the attainment of pleasure and the possession of happiness. Accordingly, when two ways are shown him, the one known to him as a pleasant path that issues in everlasting bliss, the other equally known to him as a rough and thorny road that will bring him to endless grief, he will not intelligently select the latter. But the sin that makes men knaves and slaves does not make them aware of their knavery and slavery and of the unending misery which these entail. It perverts their understanding as well as their hearts, and they try to bring their pursuit of happiness into rational consistency with their native wickedness. Hence the Scriptures tell us about the “deceivableness of unrighteousness.” Men not only deceive each other, but deceive themselves. They do not know the “exceeding sinfulness” and unspeakable misery of sin, but endeavor to make it appear a form of virtue, or, failing in this, at least to excuse it as the best attainable under the circumstances. And when the truth is told them, so that as rational creatures they might know better, they do not believe it. Only when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with its enlightening and regenerating power has come and made new creatures of fallen man can this be otherwise.

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Eph. 4:17, 18.

This vanity and darkness of the mind in its alienation from the life of God is an obstacle that is insuperable, so far as the powers of nature are concerned, in the way of all improvement of man’s moral condition. Therefore when the only possible help is offered in the grace and truth which the Gospel presents, he rejects it in his blindness, and in his carnal wisdom, which is vanity, thinks that he acts reasonably when he rejects it.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:14.

The situation therefore affords no hope of a change for the better by the exercise of any powers that yet remain in the sinful soul. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it." Jer. 17:9.

Hence when our Lord calls upon the people to "enter in at the strait gate" into the narrow way "which leadeth unto life," we certainly would fail to understand the exhortation if we assumed it to mean, that we should arouse the moral forces of our nature and hopefully seek deliverance from death by strenuous efforts of obedience to the law. The light of the Gospel shone gradually and with ever increasing brightness upon the world, and it may be that some of His hearers were not yet sufficiently enlightened to be secured against such a misunderstanding. But this could not be the Savior's meaning, as that would thwart the whole purpose of His advent and work on earth. If there were any who could not yet understand it, they were expected to grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus until they could understand it; but that would not justify us in declining to find in His words anything more than those who were yet under the bondage of the law could comprehend. Faithful followers of Christ must learn to read the whole Bible in the light of the Gospel.

If we desire to be saved, the one thing needful is to put on Christ by faith. That is, in other words, we must be born again. In Him alone we have salvation. "I am the way and the truth and the life," He tells us; "no man cometh unto the Father but by me." John 14:6. The fruits of holiness can be borne only by those who believe in Him as their Savior from sin and death, and are thus renewed in the spirit of their minds:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5.

The Son of God came into the world to be our Savior and give us life, not to show us how we, who are dead in trespasses and sins, could save ourselves by a better life under the law which was given by Moses. That would be impossible, "because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7. Jesus expounded the law which the Jews had perverted and rendered incapable of doing its

legitimate work, but never taught the people to trust in it for salvation from the curse which it pronounces upon sin.

“For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Gal 3:21.22.

In this sermon on the mount our Lord taught the law with a spiritual depth and completeness which its teachers among the Pharisees had never attained; but it was not for the purpose of flattering His hearers that they could, if they would only in a manly way exert themselves, meet all its demands and thus fulfill all righteousness. That would simply have left them on the broad road to destruction and encouraged them in the self-delusion that they could render complete satisfaction under the law, and need no Savior, His purpose was higher and holier;

“...for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17.

His exposition of the law, as well as all the rest of His work, was designed to serve this purpose. The people were led to understand the will of God as expressed in His holy commandments, not that they might deceive themselves by believing that they had fulfilled them or could fulfill them and thus be saved, but that they might see their sin and their helplessness and embrace the great salvation which He offers by His grace.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:24-27.

The plan of salvation is thus apparent: repent and believe the Gospel. That is the strait gate by which the narrow way that leads to life is entered. It is the only way, because Christ is the only Savior of sinners. The first thing necessary to share the blessedness of Christ's kingdom is to recognize our sin and the ruin which it has wrought. As long as a soul fails to see that it is lost, the Gospel way of salvation will seem foolishness. Even if some superficial knowledge of sin is attained, but the delusion is at the same time harbored that God will not hold us strictly to the law, or that we can without much difficulty rid ourselves of any faults that may be charged against us, the call of the Savior to come to Him and find rest for our souls will receive little attention. Why should we seek rescue when we are aware of no peril? Why should we appeal to a physician for help when we do not know ourselves to be sick — sick though we are unto death? In the natural pride of his heart man does not see that he is "desperately wicked," and, not realizing that he is helpless in his lost estate, he resents the offer of salvation. Therefore the Savior preaches the law to work a knowledge of sin, and calls upon all men to repent and believe the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe. Those who, despairing of their own power to deliver themselves from the curse and misery of sin, receive the Lord Jesus as the Savior sent to rescue them from eternal death, thus by His grace enter in at the strait gate and pursue the narrow way to our Father's house in heaven.

They are sad words which our Lord speaks when He says that "few there be that find it." The reason of this is not hidden from our view. The gate is strait and the way is narrow. That explains it. Man naturally prefers the wide gate, and the broad way, though he does not prefer the destruction to which it leads. He is willing to take chances in regard to that, which of course implies that he does not accept the truth when it is told him, whatever misgivings may arise in his mind. The strait gate is not according to his inclinations. It can be entered only at the sacrifice of the pleasures found in the gratification of the flesh with its affections and lusts. By nature no one is willing to crucify self that he may live unto God.

"Whosoever he be of you," saith our Lord, "that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33.

The selfishness that wants to be its own lord and refuses submission to the law of God and the acceptance of His grace for deliverance from the curse which it has brought upon the soul, finds the gate of the Gospel too strait for it to get through, and the requirement to take up the cross and follow Jesus in a life of perpetual self-denial makes the way of life too narrow for it to walk upon. The consequence naturally is that the number of those who enter in at the strait gate is small compared with the many who go in at the wide gate and pursue the broad way to everlasting death. Although the grace offered in the Gospel is sufficient for all that hear it and furnishes all needful spiritual power to make wise unto salvation every soul that does not willfully resist its heavenly efficacy, the multitude still persists in rejecting the narrow way, in consequence of which “many are called but few are chosen.”

Everything that infinite love and wisdom could do to rescue sinful souls from impending destruction has been done, and only the obstinacy of man prevents the execution of the divine will that all should be saved. The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, interposed for the salvation of all, when all had sinned. In His eternal counsels a gracious plan was devised by which this could be effected. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. The Father’s love to a sinful world is thus revealed in its heavenly glory.

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:8, 9.

The Eternal Son cordially entered upon the plan of infinite love, and in the fulness of time was made flesh to fulfill all righteousness in our stead, and for our deliverance from the curse of sin suffer its penalty upon the cross.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8.

And to overcome the obstacle existing in the unbelief of the natural heart, the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, was sent to do the gracious work of appropriating the redemption in the hearts of men.

“The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name. He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”
John 14:26.

Not another Gospel than that of our Lord Jesus Christ did He come to bring us, but the one truth in Jesus unto the salvation of all them that believe. “He shall glorify me,” says the Savior, “for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I that He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you.” John 16:14, 15. Thus the Holy Spirit completes the work of God’s love by working the faith in human hearts which is necessary to embrace the great salvation in Christ, but which no man can originate in his own soul.

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the faith.”

That a sinner is brought upon the narrow way and preserved therein unto eternal life is wholly the work of God. He has instituted means to this end, which always convey the needful grace to save the soul, so that if any are lost when the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, it is never because grace was not offered unto salvation, but always because the grace was willfully rejected. God has left nothing undone to bring the lost upon the narrow way and preserve them in it unto eternal life, and the fault is all man’s own if he chooses the broad road that leadeth to destruction. The glory of our salvation belongs to God alone; the shame and misery of our perdition belongs only to ourselves.

“After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Tit. 3:4-7.

Our gracious Lord made rich provision for continuing His saving work until the end of time. Many gave ear to His exhortation to enter into His kingdom and to these He gave the commission:

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:19, 20.

Thus His Church, which is the communion of saints, was established on earth and has been continued until this day. The strait gate of Gospel grace has stood open ever since, the narrow way that leads to life has been kept in plain view of the people, and the call to enter in and enjoy the blessings which it offers has gone out into all the world, and whosoever will may come and share the great salvation. Those who have entered in at the strait gate not only recognize their calling to bring the good tidings of salvation to all people and, prompted by the love of souls, do what they can towards teaching all nations, but realize that the promise is to them and to their children. Thus the kingdom of God is maintained and extended. Christian parents bring their children to Christ in Holy Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit is given them and they by His grace are made children of God, born again of water and the Spirit, and heirs of eternal life. As such they are to be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that being buried with Christ by baptism into His death, “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Rom. 6:3, 4.

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27.

Nourished as living branches of the Vine by the Gospel and, when maturity for self-examination and the intelligent confession of their Christian faith is reached, by communion with Christ through partaking of the holy sacrament of His body and blood, they grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Savior, and thus in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, pursue the narrow path to eternal bliss. But not all have the blessing of baptism in their infancy, and from childhood know the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Some are born in pagan lands, and have not access to the means of grace which God has committed to the Church; some, though living in easy reach of Word and Sacrament, have grown up without having been brought under their heavenly influence; and some who were carried as babes to the arms of Jesus have, through neglect of the means appointed for their spiritual preservation and growth, unhappily strayed away from the fold and must needs return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls if they would inherit the promise. Whilst the normal way of building the Church, when it is once established, is manifestly that of bringing the children to Christ in the holy sacrament of Baptism, that they may be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, and then nurtured in the Church as God’s children, the design of God to bring all nations into His kingdom renders it obvious that this will not apply in all cases. The conditions are not the same in the three classes designated. Adults must be gathered in as well as the children, and while churches provide for these and thus perpetuate and strengthen themselves, they cannot be faithful if they neglect their missionary calling, at home and abroad, to make the unsearchable riches of Christ known to all people and add to the local Church those who receive the Savior.

That some will turn a deaf ear to the Lord’s call and refuse to enter at the strait gate and walk in the narrow way, is to be expected and must not discourage us. “Many are called but few are chosen.” This is lamentable. But the reason is not that God does not desire the salvation of all alike, or that He is not sincere in extending the call whenever and wheresoever and to whomsoever the Gospel is preached. Man is prone to seek the fault in God rather than in himself. But Christians know better, and must not let such

thoughts of the flesh dishearten them in their holy work. They know better because they have the Word of the Lord Himself to enlighten them and guide them.

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezek. 33:11.

God would not have sent His Son into the world, that the world through Him might be saved; the Eternal Son of the Father would not have given His life a ransom for all, dying that all might live; and the Gospel of salvation would not have been sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to all people, if the Triune God had not meant that all should hear the good tidings and embrace the gracious offer of the remission of sins and eternal life. The Scriptures assure us that “God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 2:4.

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Pet. 3:9.

The fault is all man’s own if he is not saved, as the fault is all his own that he is in the sinful condition which needs salvation. God is willing to save all, but alas! of the many whom He calls but few are willing to come and be saved through the strait gate and the narrow way of repentance and faith. Hence the plaintive cry of our Savior:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Matt. 23:37.

It is amazing, both in the mercy of God and in the obstinacy of men when that mercy is offered them: but so it is. Our Lord's complaint is continued through all time:

“Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.” John 5:40.

But we who believe have no reason to be discouraged. Some will heed that call of grace. Compared with the multitudes who choose to remain on the broad way that leadeth to destruction they are few. But their number is still great. The Church has flourished and flourishes still. The call is never extended in vain. Some will come and be saved.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:58.

Meantime we must not forget that the way is narrow on which we are journeying. This makes it incumbent upon us to watch and pray, that we may not be seduced into by-paths or neglect the guideposts which God has graciously given us to direct us. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.” 1 Pet. 5:8, 9.

To imagine that there is no danger is itself dangerous. The world allures, our own flesh inclines to hear its voice, Satan sends false prophets to mislead us. “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life.” We need not fear while we abide in the narrow way of God's Word, for there the Lord is always with us and His grace is sufficient for us. But be thou faithful unto death, that you may receive the crown of life.

15. The Voice of Warning.

Matthew 7:15-23.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 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. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. 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. 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."

1. False Prophets

After pointing out the two ways in which men may choose to walk, the one leading to life, the other to death, Christ gives us a much needed warning against false prophets, who would lead us astray. He lovingly urges His hearers to enter the strait gate and pursue the narrow way which leads to eternal blessedness, while the multitude foolishly chooses the broad road which inevitably leads to destruction. Not only does the understanding of the natural man, darkened and corrupted as it is by sin, prefer the path that leads away from God, but many delight in teaching the errors which seem to justify their unwise choice and make it appear reasonable. The warning against false prophets therefore comes appropriately in close connection

with the lesson on the two ways open to man's choice. Teachers of error do much towards keeping people on the broad road to ruin and preventing them from finding and entering the narrow gate which opens to the way of life; and their work of evil does not end with this, but they do much also towards misleading those who have entered the strait gate and inducing them to abandon the way of life. As the power by which the Christian lives his spiritual life is the truth revealed from heaven by the Gospel, every departure from that truth in prophesying or preaching is so much done towards preventing the accomplishment of God's good will to save mankind. "If ye continue in my Word," our Savior says, "then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Those who are led away from this truth by false prophets thus endanger their souls by losing the Gospel which alone can save them.

The word prophets usually indicates those who are called to preach in the kingdom of God, and who are commissioned to proclaim the saving truth revealed from heaven. This truth is written for our learning in the Holy Scriptures. A false prophet is one who teaches otherwise than God's Word teaches, and accordingly is not faithful to the heavenly message and the divine commission. He professes to preach God's Word, but instead of this proclaims his own word. Whether he be sent or comes of his own accord under the pretense that he is sent, and whether he is conscious or not of his aberration from the inspired Word, which alone gives spiritual life and light, is not of material import for distinguishing the false from the true prophet. In this regard the one essential point to be examined is his preaching or prophesying, and that upon which the examination must be based and by which our judgment must be formed is the Word of God recorded in the Scriptures.

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them, thou shall not hearken to that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Deut. 13:1-3.

There are false prophets among the chosen people, and God sometimes even permits them to perform signs and wonders to try the faithfulness of His children. These are required to abide by His Word, whatever those who teach otherwise may hold out as an inducement to depart from it.

“To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isa. 8:20.

Nor did it become otherwise when Christ came and the fuller light of the Gospel shone upon the world. There were still false prophets, and the criterion by which they were to be judged remained the same: it was still the Word of the Lord which endureth for ever.

“There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect.” Matt. 24:24.

The duty of vigilance, that we may beware of false prophets, can therefore not be regarded as of little importance by those who sincerely desire to walk in the narrow way and lay hold on eternal life.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1.

It is not in accordance with the mind of Christ, and is neither charitable nor wise to limit the warning to extreme cases, in which the design of Satan to destroy the soul is immediately apparent and the false prophet is at once seen to be in malicious league with him. Such a limitation accords with the spirit of those who are traveling on the broad road that leads to destruction, not with the vigilant and cautious spirit of those who have entered the strait gate, and are earnestly intent upon following Christ in the way of life. The danger is great, though Satan’s devices do not always prove successful, and

some escape the destruction which he had planned for them. One must disregard the solemn teaching of the Bible and of history, if he would accept the alluring assurances of false prophets, that no danger is threatening us as long as we are sincere in our endeavors to know the truth, and that error cannot harm us unless it directly and at once renounces Christ and denies Him to be the way and the truth and the life. The undermining of the Christian foundation is the known purpose of Satan's work. To this end he disseminates his false doctrines, and he is cunning enough not to begin his undermining process by telling people to reject the Scriptures and deny that Christ came into the world to save sinners. He has made a good start if he has instilled the foolish belief that a little leaven can not leaven the whole lump, and that danger can begin only when the foundations are destroyed. Many false prophets are themselves deceived, and do their deadly work in the belief that they are rendering God service. Certainly not all are of that manifest sort who openly deny Christ and who would not be tolerated in any Church.

“There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” 2 Pet. 2:1, 2.

That is the natural outcome of all satanic lies that are spread in opposition to divine truth. If they are permitted to exert their deadly power and are unhindered in the attainment of their destructive purpose, the result of false doctrine must be dishonor to the Savior and death to the soul, as the proper work of the truth in Jesus is glory to God, and salvation to man.

But there are manifold hindrances on account of which causes do not produce their peculiar effects, because powers meet with obstructions and are resisted by opposing powers that neutralize their action. It is so in the whole realm of sin and grace. Not all sin results in death, though this is its proper consequence. The wages of sin is death. It is so even in the children of God, if they permit it to work out its inherent power and produce its natural result.

“Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Jas. 1:14, 15.

If sin were allowed to have its own pernicious way, not a soul would be saved. But Christ came to save us from our sins and the death which is their consequence. His grace is sufficient for us all, so that now no one who hears the Word of salvation through His atonement need perish. But grace, too, may be resisted so that it does not always produce its salutary effects. Sin hinders its saving work; and if it is persisted in, the grace of God will be bestowed in vain, and death will result, notwithstanding all the unspeakable mercies of God to rescue the sinner from its proper wages.

Hence is apparent the wretched unwisdom of those who represent the warnings of our Lord against false prophets to be not all manner of teaching and living otherwise than God’s Word teaches, but as referring only to those who knowingly seek entirely to overthrow Christianity, or to sins that are so radically ruinous as to preclude the possibility of the existence or the continuance of faith in the soul, and therefore to shut out the remission of sins and eternal life which grace offers. Satan has gained much if he succeeds in leading a soul to think that what he regards as little departures from the truth of the Gospel or the strictness of the law are of no importance and may safely be indulged in, as long as the main promises and requirements are retained. There is undoubtedly a difference between doctrines which are fundamental and others which are not so, and between sins which are mortal and others which are venial. But the distinction which is of moment for questions of church fellowship and for consoling the troubled conscience, is mischievous when it is manipulated by untaught men and made to serve the purposes of sin, unintentional though this may be, by inducing others to imagine that some errors and some transgressions are harmless, and require neither vigilance to avoid them nor repentance to escape their guilt. The love of God, who would keep us in the narrow path that leads to life, tells us to watch and pray that we may not enter into temptation, and to resist all beginnings of unscriptural influences; and it impresses the admonition upon us to:

“...shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase to more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker; of whom is Hymenseus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” 2 Tim. 2:16-18.

And the warning is twice given, referring both to doctrine and life:

“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9.

Some false prophets do not scatter opinions that are directly subversive of the whole foundation of grace and truth on which Christian faith rests. But when they refuse to submit to the law and the testimony which is written in the Scriptures, claiming that their doctrine is reasonable and must be right, though it does not harmonize with the very words of the Bible, the Lord admonishes us to beware of them, whatever their excuses may be for declining to accept the divine testimony as it reads and whatever their profession of good intentions may be, such as making the Word of God more palatable to men by bringing its contents into better harmony with the advancement of learning and the changed demands of the times. No reasons can justify or excuse the wretched wisdom of men who would be wiser than God, and who in such folly presume to correct the eternal truth of Scripture, by which we must all be judged on the last day, and against which nothing can stand when heaven and earth shall pass away. Therefore those who are wise will heed the admonition:

“Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” Heb. 13:9.

Whether the men who teach false doctrines mean well or ill is, so far as our Lord’s command to beware of them is concerned, not the question which it places before the Christian conscience. Whoever they may be or whatever

they may be, we must beware of the teaching that conflicts with God's Word. That Word is infallibly sure, and he who believes it has certainty of the truth which it declares. Adverse opinions of man cannot render it questionable. Hence the apostle could write:

“As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Gal 1:9.

Even supposing that one who teaches doctrines inconsistent with those given by revelation of God has no wicked design, being deceived rather than a deceiver, the soul that continues in the Lord's Word, and therefore knows the truth, must beware of him. Charity as well as fidelity to the Savior requires this; for the nature of error being to spread and ultimately to destroy, true love cannot refrain from preventing the operation of the pernicious power so far as this is possible.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Rom. 16:17, 18.

The fact that the warnings against the false prophets generally directed attention to the deadly results of their false teaching, when it works out its natural power and reaches its natural end, has led many a careless reader to conclude that a professed teacher is a false prophet only when he is consciously an enemy of the truth revealed in Scripture, and when his teaching subverts the foundation of Christianity and renders it impossible for him and his followers to be Christians. Much damage has been done in the Church by such superficial reasoning. Vital truths have been pronounced indifferent, the vigilance of earnest Christians has been relaxed, and consciences that were standing in awe of God's Word have been gradually rendered obdurate by the repeated assurances that a little leaven of sin is at-

tended with no danger as long as it is not of a kind, in doctrine or life, to produce immediate death. The warning against it is given because its nature is to produce death, and it eateth as doth a canker, so that if it is admitted into the soul and treated as harmless, death will surely come as its inevitable result. The contention that our Lord's description of the false prophets as persons "who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves," shows that only bold, bad men, who lie in wait to deceive and delight in destroying souls, are meant by the term false prophets, is a specimen of such superficial interpretation that breaks the force of the words of warning spoken in love; and the sentimental appeal to the sympathies of our nature, intimating that it would be unkind in the extreme to stigmatize a Roman bishop as a false prophet because of his Romish errors, though he is regarded by the whole community as a good man, is of the same sort as the contention which it is designed to support. But our Lord does not say that the false prophets are all designing knaves who have no mercy for sinful men, who all know that they are ravening wolves, who put on their sheep's clothing to gain access to the flock in order to devour the sheep, and who have as little regard for the Word of God as they have for the salvation of souls. He does not tell us to judge their hearts and to declare them false prophets because they are ungodly men, who are consciously serving the devil and gathering recruits for his truculent army of enemies of God and all righteousness. Such judging of the hearts of men, whether they are teachers or not, is God's prerogative, and our Lord not only does not require us to exercise it, but has in this very sermon on the mount strictly forbidden it. What He does here say is this, that the false prophets appear like innocent and harmless sheep, but are in reality destructive and dangerous wolves, and that we must be on our guard that we may not be deceived by appearances. Outwardly they present themselves as sheep, of whom we would suspect no evil; but that does not excuse us from the exercise of that vigilance which God enjoins and which the eternal interests at stake demand. The divine injunction is:

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." Heb. 13:9.

The truth alone can make us free and save the soul, and many false teachers have gone out into the world whose false teaching tends to undermine our faith and divert us from the path of life. Therefore we must “prove all things and hold fast that which is good.” 1 Thess. 5:21. When the prophets come to us outwardly in sheep’s clothing, it is so far well; but we must look further and ascertain whether they are inwardly, in deed and in truth, what they profess to be.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1.

If men come to us with a message ostensibly from heaven, but which is in conflict with the Word which God has given us for our guidance, our duty is to avoid them as false prophets. The question whether they have a malicious purpose, or are ignorantly misled, God will decide. Both our devotion to the glory of God and our care for the salvation of our souls make this plain. We must beware of false prophets.

Enemies of the cross of Christ who set out as teachers with the conscious intention of leading souls away from Christ and keeping them on the broad way which ends in destruction, would accomplish but little in the churches if they openly avowed their pernicious purpose. They would then be ravening wolves who do not come in sheep’s clothing, but boldly manifest themselves as wolves, and they would be shunned by all who desire to escape the damnation of hell. It is not the notoriously wicked infidel that does the greatest mischief among the people interested in religious truth. The success of false teachers is largely owing to their claim of being true teachers. They come in sheep’s clothing and thus gain access to the churches. This sheep’s clothing is of course not any avowal of deviation from the Scriptures in doctrine or life, but their profession of soundness in the faith and their regard for holy living. On this account they are regarded by Christian believers as brethren and welcomed in their congregations as such. The mischief which they do there is made possible by their wearing the garb of true prophets and thus securing the people’s confidence.

Among those who have rejected the Divinity of Christ and taught the people to regard Him merely as a good man whose doctrine was sublime

and whose life was exemplary, there were some men who were generally recognized as upright and lovable. But this does not alter the instruction given us:

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” 2 John 9:11.

Some Jesuits are distinguished for their self-denying zeal in what they regard as the cause of Christianity. But they do not cease on that account to be false prophets, of whom all who would save their souls should beware. The sentimentalism that shrinks from applying the term to those who teach otherwise than God’s Word teaches, because these appear to be good men, is not of God and does not promote godliness.

Our Lord bids His disciples to beware of the false prophets, which implies that it is possible to distinguish them and avoid them.

“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.”

The fruit indicates the kind of tree, and we are not excusable if we mistake thorn bushes and thistles for grapevines and fig trees. Unfortunately many commentators on the passage have made it difficult to apply the test which seems so simple, and have led multitudes of the common people to think it impracticable and to pass it by as useless. The fruits are represented as the good works and holy lives of teachers, who are supposed to become manifest as false prophets when these fruits do not appear. But is a man teaching false doctrine because he fails himself to walk by the holy rule which he teaches?

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude and to His disciples, saying, the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.” Matt. 23:1-3.

As long as they teach right they are not to be avoided as false prophets; if their example does not agree with their teaching, we must beware of their bad example, not of their good instruction, by reason of which they are true prophets. It is not the fact that all false teachers are manifest by their ungodly living before the eyes of all people, and it is unjust to judge men and churches by such a criterion. False teachers sometimes lead blameless lives, so far as appearances can be an indication, and teachers of the truth sometimes do not adorn the doctrine with holy lives as they should. The criterion thus set forth is neither true nor charitable, and there is no warrant for it in the words or the works of our Savior. Rather such sanctity is the sheep’s clothing in which the wolves come to us, and by which the people are deceived. An unholy life is a disgrace to the teacher and mars his influence for good, but it does not make him a false prophet. As long as he teaches the truth of God’s Word he is a true prophet, much as he may merit rebuke and ultimately expulsion as a false Christian.

The fruit of a prophet or teacher is his prophesying or teaching. By this he is to be judged as a prophet. It does not require special proof that every Christian teacher is required to be a Christian believer. No one should be called to be a leader of Christ’s flock who is not himself a follower of Christ. All that is possible should be done to shut out from the holy ministry men who do not repent and believe the Gospel. The prophet should be a Christian man, who is sound in the faith, and sincerely follows after holiness, as is required and expected of every disciple of Christ. He is a Christian brother among Christian brethren, whose greatest glory is not that he is a prophet, but that he is a child of God and an heir of heaven. Higher than this he cannot rise on earth. But the shepherd of the flock of our Lord has an important and responsible office in the fold. He is the teacher of the Word of life, which is the power of God unto the salvation of the people. If he teaches the truth, of which the Son of God came unto the world to bear witness, this truth will make free every soul that believes it; if he teaches his own opinions and endeavors to palm these off as the light from on high that

leads to everlasting glory, he leaves the people in their darkness and death, for such teaching has no power to regenerate and save. “In vain do they worship me,” saith our Savior, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Matt. 15:9. Instead of teaching opinions and ordinances of men, the prophet must set forth the truth given by revelation of God, and rebuke the “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially them of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses.” “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.” Titus 1:10-12. The fruit which the teacher bears as a prophet is the doctrine that he teaches. This must be tested by the Word of God, which is written for our learning in Holy Scripture. To this the teacher and the taught have access and are alike bound. Of the teacher it is required that he be found faithful, “holding fast the faithful Word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” Tit. 1:9. If he does not do this, the faithful members of the flock, determined to continue in the Word by which they try his doctrine, must admonish him, and if he persists in his false teaching they have no alternative but to exclude him as a false prophet. “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” False teaching must be rejected under all circumstances, and that involves the rejection of the teacher who will not abandon his error.

2. Leads People Astray

“Not every one that saith unto Me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. 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 connection of this with the foregoing warning against false prophets is evident. False teaching leads many astray, who are induced to imagine that,

if they only accept the form of Christianity in what they regard as its main feature of calling upon the name of the Lord, they shall inherit its promises. Some false prophets themselves are not disposed openly to reject Christ and subvert the foundation of man's salvation through the gracious plan which is revealed in Him. They would be Christians, and their departures from the Gospel are not such that all Christians must deny their claim to be disciples of Christ and to the hope of eternal life through His name. Some of these prophets are themselves deceived by the same falsities with which they deceive others. But although even whole congregations and denominations may be misled into the acceptance and promulgation of dangerous doctrines, so that their churches must be recognized as Christian because they still retain enough of the truth to save the souls of sincere believers, in whom this truth, not the false doctrine, becomes effective, the deceivers and hypocrites will not forever pass as true disciples of Christ. On the judgment day the Lord who searcheth the hearts and judgeth righteous judgment, will profess that He never knew them as true believers and will then, as He does now, refuse to recognize them as members of His kingdom, because they have refused to own Him as the King and to bow to the scepter of His Word. Meantime the sincere believers, in whom the false teaching has not become effective to undermine their faith, although they had the misfortune to live in congregations that were under the guidance of false prophets, are saved, as are all other Christian believers, by the faith which clings to the Savior, and in Him have daily and richly the forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life through His merits. The warning in the verses before us is general. There are many who say, "Lord, Lord," thus professing to be His subjects in the kingdom of grace, but who do not stand in awe of His Word and whom, because they do not repent and believe the Gospel, He does not own as His disciples. The number of those is large who flatter themselves that membership in the visible Church and external performance of the duties which this involves is a sufficient guarantee of their salvation, overlooking the essential truth that the promise of eternal life is given only to those who believe with their hearts as well as confess with their lips. They deceive themselves. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Rom. 8:9. No membership in the external church organization and no zeal and activity in the external work of the Church can supply the place of faith in the heart which embraces the Savior and appropriates His righteousness.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Eph. 2:8, 9.

The warning given by our Lord cannot be emphasized too much and too often: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” And because false prophets do not cease to magnify human ability and merit and preach salvation by human effort and righteousness, too much stress cannot be laid upon our Lord’s own instruction concerning our salvation, that we make no mistake as to what is the will of our Father which is in heaven. When Jesus was asked, “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” He “answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him, whom He hath sent.” John 6:29. So to the great question, “What must I do to be saved?” the constant answer is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” This is unquestionably the work of God in this sense also, that God the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. But it is the one needful work which the sinner must do to execute the Father’s will, which is our salvation, and for the accomplishment of which the Holy Spirit is given us through the means of grace, since by our own reason or strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. If anyone would do the will of our Father which is in heaven, let him repent of his sins and believe the Gospel.

“This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life.” John 6:40.

This is in no respect inconsistent with the declaration that the will of God is our sanctification. Certainly God would have us walk in the way of His commandments, which is the way of holiness and good works. But His will is first of all to save us from the sin and death that have come upon us. This can be done only by faith in the Savior, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Then we are qualified for further obedience to His will as His peculiar people, who glorify His name by a right

confession in doctrine and life according to His Word. So far is the proposition, that doing the will of the Father is believing in Christ, from being in conflict with the other proposition, that doing the will of the Father is keeping His commandments, that the latter, is conditioned by the former. No one can walk in the law of the Lord until he has received power from on high through faith in the Redeemer, who is the way and the truth and the life. Therefore when the apostle has declared that we are saved by grace through faith, that this is a gift of God, not a product of our own power, and that it is not of works, lest any man should boast, he immediately adds:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

A difficulty has been found in the statement, that the persons who hypocritically say Lord, Lord, and whom the Lord refuses to recognize as His disciples, have cast out devils and done many wonderful works in His name. The assumption is that only true believers could perform such miracles. But the difficulty is not formidable. There certainly is no ground, on the basis of such an assumption, to make the ill-natured charge that the Scriptures contradict themselves. They state the truth, which Christians accept, whether they can give a satisfactory explanation of its implications or not. But there is nothing dark or perplexing in the case before us. Even on the gratuitous assumption of fault-finders, that no insincere person could perform wonderful works in Jesus’ name, there is no contradiction involved; for these hypocrites may be putting forth a false claim when they appeal to the miracles which they have performed, or they may have performed them before they had fallen away and their godliness had become a mere form. But the assumption on which the objection is founded is itself unfounded.

“For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Matt. 24:24.

This is indeed one of the notes of Antichrist, “whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.” 2 Thess. 2:9, 10. The Word must stand, and no signs and wonders be allowed to lead us away from that.

Our Lord’s warning is always timely. Satan is ever seeking to deceive us; the world offers powerful seductions to lure Christians away from the only hope of life; and the flesh, which is always reluctant to follow the motions of the Spirit, renders all the solicitations of the world and the devil plausible. We are all too prone to think that all is well as long as we continue to say Lord, Lord, and are not conscious of any deliberate purpose to renounce the Savior. The deceitfulness of our own hearts prevents us from seeing the dangers that so easily beset us, and gradually habits of indifference are formed to what seem unimportant portions of revealed truth and slight deviations from the law of righteousness. And these things grow upon us while we slumber. Each addition appears but a little thing, until the little leaven has leavened the whole lump and we have a name to live, but are dead.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, steadfast in the faith.” 1 Pet. 5:8. 9.

The voice of warning which our Lord gives us is full of love and wisdom, and the Spirit in our hearts entreats us to hear it and heed it. Beware of false prophets, who come indeed in sheep’s clothing, but whose work, whether intentional or not, is that of the wolf. And beware of the self-deceit which thinks itself secure while it says Lord, Lord, though the heart is not in it. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

16. The Wise Builder. Matthew 7:24-27.

THE GREAT SERMON concludes with a comparison of the hearer's attitude towards it to the building of a house. Some are wise and some are foolish. One man builds on a rock, and the structure withstands all the elements of destruction; another builds on the sand, and when the storms come it is swept away. One hears the Lord's words, believes them, and continues steadfast until the end and is saved. Another hears them and gives no heed, perhaps scoffs at them, or learns to say Lord, Lord, but refuses to open his heart to embrace the consolation, and receives the grace of God in vain. Alas, that among the many for whom Christ died so few are wise and accept the great salvation!

“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.”

The words with which the sermon ends have a doleful sound, suggesting the solemn words of the prophet:

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered”? Jer. 8:20-22.

But it need not be a despairing cry that goes up when the words come to our ears. They are spoken as a warning, not as the closing of the doors of grace on a sinful generation. The harvest is not yet past for us who read, and there is a balm in Gilead, and there is a physician there, that the mortal wounds of sin may yet be healed by Him who is mighty to save when all earthly skill and power have failed. The Lord Jesus, who speaks the words, still lives and still calls to all of us: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” We who read, still have time to build wisely, that our house may not fall when the tempest comes. These things are written for our learning: “he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Cor. 6:2.

Exhortations to hear the Word of God abound in Holy Scripture. The reason of this is evident. God does His gracious work through His Word.

“By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” Ps. 33:6.

The preservation of all things is effected by the same power and means by which they were created. He “upholdeth all things by the Word of His power.” Heb. 1:3. And the Word of His grace and power is the means also by which He reaches and influences the hearts of men. “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Rom. 1:16. Hence all spiritual life depends on the sinner’s hearing the heavenly truth and receiving its heavenly power,

“being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Pet. 1:23-25.

This Word must therefore be heard, if God’s will is to be done by men and in men. But hearing and reading the Word is not all that is required. If we merely hear it, and stop at that, the purpose for which God gave it is not attained. It is the means by which He would work faith in our hearts unto salvation and sanctify us for His service and glory. Alas, that so many to whom this word of salvation is sent allow themselves to be deceived by the vain thought, that if they only hear the Word they are doing a good work and acquire the merit of it, and that this is enough for such as would be plain Christians and make no profession to be saints. The Word is given us as a means of God’s grace, and accomplishes that whereunto it is sent only when it is received into the heart by faith.

“Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the Gospel preached as well as unto them; but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest.” Heb. 4:1-3.

Therefore:

“...receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” Jas. 1:22, 23.

This self-deception is nothing wonderful in this world of sin, strange as it may seem when it occurs among those who have the light of the Gospel and profess to be Christians. The natural heart is prone to it. The impulses of our nature are not in accord with the righteousness of God. To follow the Word of truth revealed from heaven requires the renunciation of self. "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Matt. 16:24. This is not the easy task which some imagine it to be. Our nature strives to retain its sense of its own power and importance, and reason therefore exerts its energies, when the Word of God is heard and conscience is awakened, to bring this Word into harmony with its own inclinations. The righteousness which God requires is thus reduced to the civil righteousness of external works which nature approves, and the outward work is substituted for the inward holiness which the divine law demands. The good deeds performed and the natural sympathies of our hearts with the form of piety thus produced are readily mistaken for obedience to the Word, and the self-deception is accomplished. The Pharisees, who were the best product of legal righteousness in their day, and many of whom were no doubt sincere in their profession to be disciples of Moses, may be cited as a notable example. The Romanists furnish a similar case in Christendom. They profess to be followers of Christ, and no doubt many of them are sincere in their profession. But they deceive themselves when they presume that their submission to the pope and their devotion to the papal system of work-righteousness is accepting Christ as their Savior and following Him. It is pitiful that such large numbers of nominal Christians, at least some of whom are no doubt sincere in their desire to escape the damnation that is denounced against sin and to flee for refuge to the Savior, are deluded by the fancy that their own righteousness will save them, while they obey a corrupt Church that teaches for doctrines the commandments of men and is satisfied with the form of godliness. Thus it comes that notwithstanding the clear light given us in Holy Scripture and the earnest warning not to be deceived, many build their house upon the sand.

When the rains descend and the floods come and the winds blow, the inevitable happens to those who, though they desire to be recognized as Christians, have only a natural religion in a Christian garb. Some have trusted in the science which this world teaches, and which flatters them with the thought that it furnishes all that need be known or can be known of cre-

ated things, or of an alleged Creator of man and the earth on which he lives, and of their ultimate destiny. But this revelation in nature, though good and profitable for the uses of this world, knows no Savior and nothing of the purpose of God in regard to man after death has ended his earthly career. Some have professed acceptance of the Gospel and its glorious hopes of eternal blessedness through the atoning blood of Christ, but have failed to let the law expose to them their sin and reveal to them the divine curse that is upon it, and thus avoided the strait gate of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore they continue on in the broad road that leads to destruction, with never a fear, until the storm comes, that their Christian profession will in such a condition avail them nothing. Thus there is a large number of people in the Christian churches who are indifferent about the saving truth of God's Word, or about the holy life which is required to adorn the doctrine there revealed for our salvation, and who cannot abide the trials which Christians must endure, but in times of temptation fall away.

These times will surely come, and all who profess to be Christ's must be prepared for them. Those who do not watch and pray, and faithfully use the means of grace, which work and nurture faith in the soul, are building their house on the sand, and it must fall when the storm comes. The truth will be spoken against, its confessors will be ridiculed and persecuted, and the flesh, secretly in league with the foe from the start, will soon bring about an unconditional surrender. The house of the religionist who seeks to rescue himself from the ravages of sin and win a place in heaven by the exercise of his natural powers, whether of thought or sentiment, of will or works, is built upon the sand, and all his efforts, herculean though they may be, will not protect it against the rains and floods and winds that bear down upon it: it must fall, and no attempts to patch it or prop it can avert the calamity. False prophets, "that see vanity and that divine lies," will endeavor to flatter the deluded souls that there is no danger, and that the threatened disaster is all a dream; but the Word of our God shall stand, and what it declares must come to pass.

“Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying. Peace, and there was no peace, and one built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it.” Ezek. 13:10, 11.

No power of earth or hell shall be able to preserve the soul or the church that builds its hopes of salvation on any other foundation than that which God has laid in Christ. If people will not heed the instructions and warnings graciously given us in Holy Scripture, they must abide the consequences. The house built upon the sand must fall, and great will be the fall of it.

Since God has given us His Word to guide us, there is no need, as there is no sense, in our trying to find another foundation for our hope of eternal blessedness than that which He has laid and which His Word reveals.

“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.”

The Christian faith has a sure foundation.

“Thus saith the Lord God, 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. Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.” Isa. 28:16, 17.

Fleeing to supposed hiding places and refuges of lies to escape from the wrath to come, is only the result of men’s own folly who, thinking them-

selves wise, become fools. We have a Savior, and the Word of God directs us to Him as a mighty Savior. We need no other; there is no other; there can be no other.

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-12.

The professing Christian who neglects this foundation is building his house upon the sand instead of the Rock, which is Christ, and which bids defiance to every stormy wind that blows.

Nor is it enough that we recognize Christ as our teacher in the ways of righteousness. Lost souls need something more than a teacher that shows us how to be holy, as God requires us to be, and thus to save ourselves. He is not a Savior by teaching us to be our own saviors. That we cannot be, and such instruction could not give us the consolation which the sinner needs who trembles under the terrors of the law. We do not build upon the Rock as long as we do not know Christ and trust in Him as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. He is the Word made flesh to the end that He might fulfill all righteousness in our stead, doing what we are required to do and suffering the wages of our sin.

“Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” Isa. 53:5, 6.

He alone is our Savior, and to Him alone belongs all the glory of our salvation, “He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4:25. Not what we do, or can do, forms a solid foundation on which to build our hope of eternal life, but what the Son of God did and suffered as our gracious Substitute.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” Gal. 4:4-7.

As long as men, though they profess to receive Christ and call themselves Christians, refuse to believe that He is the eternal Son of God, very God of very God, who was manifest in the flesh to offer Himself as a sacrifice to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and to redeem all sinners from the curse that sin has brought upon them, they are not building upon the sure foundation. Rejecting the atonement made by One that was mighty to save, they deprive themselves of all the power and all the comfort that lies in truly receiving Christ as the Savior.

“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.” 1 John 4:1-3.

“Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed.” 2 John 9, 10.

And this doctrine of Christ as the Word made flesh is the doctrine of our salvation through the atonement made by the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world. Not that Christ was a great legislator and a heroic advocate of the right and the good, that we might learn by His precepts and example how to become good like Him and thus save our souls, is the precious Gospel written in the Bible for our learning, but that He was delivered into death for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Building upon Him as the Rock of Ages, the believer is safe against all the powers of darkness and of death.

But they do not truly build on Him who, though they claim to preach and confess Christ, still urge the merit and the necessity of good works for salvation, as if something more were needed to fulfill all righteousness than the atoning work of our Savior. It is as ungrateful as it is absurd to think that the stupendous sacrifice which the Son of God made upon the cross must be perfected by adding our sin-stained works of the law, and the royal robe of His merit were rendered beautiful and effective by pinning on it the filthy rags of our own righteousness. The only way to enjoy the salvation which our blessed Lord secured for all the world is to accept it by faith.

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:11, 12.

The idea that men must do something yet to lay a good foundation, after God has done all and is doing all that the glory may be all His own as His alone is the power, is never suggested by the Scriptures, but is a product of their own sinful hearts, by which Satan would lead them away from Christ.

“That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written. Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Gal. 3:11-14.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28.

The law of God is holy and good, and God commands us to walk in it. But because of the sin that is in us no man could fulfill its requirements and be holy as God is holy. Therefore its curse came upon all men because of their transgressions. But God, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, sent His Son into this world of sin to fulfill all the requirements of the law in our stead.

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21.

And now when He in pursuance of His gracious plan, by His Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to receive our Savior and accept the great salvation offered freely by His grace, without any merit or worthiness of ours, He wants us to walk worthy of Him according to His holy law; to which the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us, also moves us. But the thought is satanic that our cheerful obedience to the law then proceeds from the mercenary motive of setting up a legal righteousness of our own, to the disparagement of Christ's righteousness received by faith, and to our own exclusion from its gracious benefits. That is building our house upon the sand, while we profess to be building upon the Rock, which is in full view, but which we fully ignore.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” Gal. 5:4, 5.

The house that is built upon this rock shall never fall, however fierce the storms that beat upon it.

Self-righteous souls continue, as they did in the time of Christ and later in the days of Luther, to traduce the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. With seeming concern to uphold true righteousness, the Pharisees, ancient and modern, deplore the teaching which eliminates all creature merit and rejects all human zeal to promote man's own glory. They profess to believe that the removal of the incitement to holy living based on the necessity of good works to salvation and on the hope of rewards here and hereafter, must tend to undermine true morality and disparage Christianity. But people reason thus because they have not known the Scriptures and have not realized the power of faith. He who has experienced the terrors of conscience under the wrath of God denounced by the law against his sins, and who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel and found peace in believing, is not at all likely now to think of claiming any merit for himself or of buying with his works the peace which the merits of Christ, bestowed by grace and embraced by faith, have given him without money and without price. The thought cannot be permitted to enter his heart, that the merits of Christ's bitter suffering and death are insufficient and must be supplemented by his own good deeds be-

fore they can avail for his salvation. It would be an insult to the Savior of which no one could be guilty without renouncing Him and remaining in the bondage of sin. Those who receive Him by faith find rest for their souls, and receiving power to become the children of God rejoice to do His will. They are thus endued with power from on high, as they were not by nature, and the grace which saves their souls by faith makes them zealous workers by love.

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Rom. 3:31.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

He who builds thus, builds wisely, and his building shall not fall when the storm comes.

“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.”

He expounded the law, but it was that we might understand and believe the Gospel. Hear Him. To whom should we go but to Thee, O Christ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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