

Gospel Words — Eleventh Series.

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A Series of 4pp. Gospel Tracts by W.K. for distribution after preaching.

1 Two Masters

Matt. 6: 25.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 329-330. Gospel No. 11-1.)

When man fell, he abandoned God as Master; he gained by sin another master, even Satan, the great rebel against the true God. The race followed the fallen parents. "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned" (Rom. 5: 12). Such is the moral history of man, recorded in Genesis, there summarised, here reasoned on by the apostle. So vain, so blind, is every man, that he is apt to go no higher than himself in accounting for sin. But it is not so: neither Jew nor Gentile originated sin. It began with the head of the race, long before those distinctions. It was an innocent man too, though Adam was not deceived, but the woman being quite deceived was involved in transgression (1 Tim. 2: 14). Sin became the state of all, while each added his own sins also. Satan thus became master in fact of the race; and from the first the guilty pair hid away from God's presence, before "He drove out the man."

Henceforth all for good turned on another, the Second man, the Last Adam. Sinful man can neither atone for sins nor get rid of sin. And from the fall Jehovah Elohim clearly intimated the great truth that deliverance can come only from the woman's Seed, who, Himself bruised, should bruise the Serpent's head, that is, destroy the mysterious enemy, Jesus, the Son of God, born of the virgin, alone answers to this earliest oracle, and to every other in scripture. How many besides His incarnation converge in Him and can apply to no other, in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension! Above all He was to suffer once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us who believe to God. For no external rite could adequately meet the dire need. It was not purifying only, but atonement there must be by One who, being God and man in one person, suited and alone could suit God and man, the Holy One whom God

made sin for us, that we might become His righteousness in Christ. Hence repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, must be in man.

There is thus faith-obedience, the root of all other obedience in practice. It is not mere outward separateness by circumcision or any thing akin. The sanctification of the Spirit is thereby secured in a new life imparted to the believer for Christ's obedience as well as His blood-sprinkling. We thenceforth obey as He did, not as slaves under law like Israel with the solemn sanction of the victim's blood on them and on the book of the law, threatening death on disobedience; we obey as sons, on whom grace rests, and as we are begotten of God, so have we Christ's blood that cleanseth from every sin. As we were in baptism buried with Christ unto His death (for nothing short could suffice even as a starting-point), so we also, as He was raised from the dead, should walk in newness of life. What then? Shall we sin because, even if once Jews, we are no longer under law but under grace? Away with it. Know we not that to whom we yield ourselves bondmen for obedience, we are bondmen to him whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Through Christ and His work set free from sin, and become bondmen to God, we have our fruit unto holiness and the end life eternal.

Thus it is that sin shall not have dominion over us. Not law but grace gives power; and grace and truth came through Jesus, as John 1 expressly declares in contrast with law, which however good in itself could only slay one in whom sin was and worked. For sinful man salvation hangs on Him. Without His blood is no remission; in virtue of it He washed us from our sins, and in newness of life (His life as risen from among the dead), we are fitted to walk worthily and please God.

But Satan ever seeks to mislead. And no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. "Ye cannot," said our Lord, "serve God and mammon." This tests those who bear His name. Never was mammon more widely sought in Christendom than now. How is it with your own soul? Are you, a professing Christian, a slave to mammon? A divided heart is a disloyal one. No one can serve two masters. Think of the young ruler who in sorrow turned away from following Christ, because he loved his possessions. Think of the apostle who for a paltry sum sold his Master. How true it is that, hating the one, we love the other, or holding to the one, we despise the other! Mammon commands the world; and if we love the world, or the things in the world, we serve mammon. But what does a man profit if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Ye cannot serve two masters, God and mammon.

2 The Prudent builder, ... and the foolish.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 343-344. Gospel No. 11-2.)

"Other foundation can no one lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ," says the apostle (1 Cor. 3: 11). Have you Him as your foundation, dear reader? If it be of faith, you will not doubt of His sufficiency. "He is the Rock; His work is perfect; for all His ways are righteousness." So an Israelite could say of Jehovah; and Jesus is Jehovah. But He is more, and now more is revealed, especially since He the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth. Nor this only: "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

He is the One for your soul, for your guilt, for your sins. If the Son of God became the Lamb of God, and you believe on Him, surely you need not, you cannot rightly, question that He avails perfectly for you. Yea, you are bound, if you believe Who He is, to receive without hesitation what God's word declares He undertook and has done. The atoning work is done; it is not future for you; nor is it a-doing

either, but is done; and its efficacy is perfect for every soul that believes God about Jesus, His Son. His blood cleanseth from all sin. You who say that you believe do God wrong, if you receive not His word and rest not with confidence on the foundation that is laid. There is none other: Jesus is the one foundation for lost sinners.

God commends His love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ died for us. Do we ask more? We being still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. We had nothing but sins: He gives all the good we want, having suffered for all the bad that was in us. Such is the Saviour of sinners. None that is pretended even resembles Him. The Virgin mother needed Him for her soul, as did every other saint. All men need grace to save them through faith; for all are sinners. Neither angels nor the archangel can avail in any degree; they are but upheld by the word of His power. Nor will God save a sinner but through faith in His Son Who humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, to glorify God and to suffer for sins, Just for unjust. Whoever denieth the Son hath not the Father either; he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also (1 John 2).

But in our text, which closes the sermon on the Mount, it is another truth: not redemption (which was not there the object) but the absolute necessity of obedience in all who call Jesus Lord. To say Lord, Lord, without doing His Father's will, is worthless. Many shall say in the future day of account, Have we not prophesied through Thy name, and through Thy name cast out demons, and through Thy name done many works of power? But He will answer, I never knew you: depart from Me, workers of lawlessness. It was hollow profession, whatever the works of power, which only aggravated the guilt and will add to the endless remorse. There was no life possessed in Christ, and consequently no obedience, to which every believer is sanctified (1 Peter 1: 2). Without holiness none shall see the Lord (Heb. 12: 11). The point is here that obedience is indispensable from each one that bears His name.

Hence the Lord concludes, "Whoever therefore heareth these my words and doeth them, I will liken him to a prudent man which built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and fell upon that house, and it fell not; for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these my words, and doeth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and fell upon that house, and it fell, and its fall was great" (Matt. 7: 24-27).

It is not redemption only that sinful man needs, but life eternal. In Jesus only are both found, and the believer receives both. Many there are who profess His name, and boast of redemption in Him, the forgiveness of offences, but never think of present life in Him. Alas! they deceive themselves. To the defiled and unbelieving, whatever they profess, nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works deny Him. They say, Lord, Lord; but they are false to His name. Had they believed, they would have had life in His name, and brought forth fruit of righteousness. But not having Christ as their life, they had no fruit unto holiness, and never grew because they had no true knowledge of God. Life, life eternal, as a present ground for serving God in obedience, is as essential as redemption. Woe is to such as have neither. Still more bitter is the woe of such as deny either: they are enemies of the truth.

3 The ways, N. and W.

The Narrow and the Wide Ways.

Matt. 7: 13, 14.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 357-358. Gospel No. 11-3.)

The Lord sets before those who heard Him the energy requisite for entering the kingdom.

When man was unfallen, he had only to abide where Jehovah Elohim set him. A single restriction was laid on him as a test of the obedience that was due. He might freely eat of every other tree in paradise, pleasant to the sight and good for food; but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden on pain of death. The divine Creator was also the moral Governor; and man, to abide blessed, must bow to His word in grateful subjection, assured that His will was good no less than wise. That He forbade was enough. To disobey Him was sin and death. And so man learnt to his sorrow, shame, and ruin, when following the woman deceived by the serpent, he violated the plain commandment and fell.

Since then the race broke more and more into sin. Lawlessness prevailed; till at length Jehovah 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. The end of all flesh came before God; for it was not only that all flesh had corrupted its way here below, but that the earth was filled with violence. Nor was it only Noah finding grace in Jehovah's eyes through faith, but a deliverance from the deluge was granted to him and his house, and a preservation of enough of the creatures in the ark to renew the post-diluvial earth. There the dispensed ways of God were to be displayed, man fully convicted after the most patient trial, and Himself revealed in His Son, but first on the ground of responsibility, till sovereign grace displace all evil, and righteousness reign to His glory; finally, when the kingdom closes, dwelling in holy power and peace and goodness when God is all in all.

Meanwhile, as the course of the world has ever been and is now more than ever man doing his own will and pleasing himself, the path of faith is ever in separation to God and His word. Christ is the One revealed by God and revealing Him in order to make this knowledge good in all who believe.. All saints since sin came into the world looked to Him, and were lightened, and their faces shall never be confounded.

Since the Word became flesh and wrought redemption, grace abounds more exceedingly. Nor is it grace only, but this reigning through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord. Remission of sins, yea, peace made through the blood of His cross, is preached to every creature; that whosoever believes may know himself made nigh in virtue of Christ's blood, God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them.

Still there are difficulties, dangers, and enemies which each soul that heeds the call of God must face. He who is quickened is sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (1 Peter). The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Such is man's moral bent in his very nature fallen as it is. Nor is this by any means all; for the friendship of the world (and what man has not sought it?) is enmity with God; and this so surely that whosoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Then the power of Satan, the liar and murderer, is the most directly destructive of all. Who is sufficient for these things? It is, and must only be, of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.

But every natural influence here below is in Satan's hands, and as hostile to man as to God. Therefore the Lord says, "Come in through the narrow gate; because wide [is] the gate and broad the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that come in through it; because narrow [is] the gate and straitened the way, that leadeth to life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. 7: 13, 14).

Follow the multitude, as it follows the wise according to the flesh, the mighty, and the noble, and you are lost. Public opinion may be well enough for things of this life; but it is never founded on God's word. This sets forth Christ and Him crucified, which to the perishing is foolishness, but to those that are saved the power of God, and His wisdom. So faith receives, and enjoys now, and is blessed for

ever. It hears Christ's word and believes God that sent Him. It distrusts and turns away from the world which cast Him out and crucified Him. It seeks not ease or pleasure for the flesh, but follows Him who was despised by the vain, and abhorred by the self-righteous, and loathed by such as sought their carnal desires. Hence it is and must be the narrow gate and the straitened way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

Those who trust self and the world naturally prefer the wide gate and the broad way. But beware, poor soul! Such is the way that leads to destruction. It may look fair now, yet what solace will it be then that many come in through that wide but fatal gate? The proud and the mean, the haughty and the servile, the highest and the lowest, the dissolute and the violent, the superstitious and the sceptical, the self-satisfied and the hypocritical enter through it into the broad road whose end is perdition. O my fellow-sinners, hear Him who is Himself the way, ay the sole and sure way to the Father. Never did He refuse one that cast himself as a lost one on His grace and truth; never does He fail to guide aright each that calls on His name. He is the Saviour of all that believe. His sheep hear His voice, and as He knows them, they follow Him; and He gives them life eternal, and they shall never perish, nor shall any one seize them out of His hand (John 10: 27, 28).

4 The Salt and the Light

Matt.5: 13-16.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 371-372. Gospel No. 11-4.)

In the preceding verses the Lord lays down the character of such as belong to the kingdom of the heavens. Now He states their position here below. Is it truly applicable to you? Do you in unbelief treat it as impracticable or indifferent?

If I own myself a lost sinner, and in me, that is in my flesh, no good thing dwells, neither salt nor light is mine, but sin dwells in me. It would be sheer presumption to claim that I am born either the one or the other. Naturally I am corrupt, and as to God and His things dark as night. Important as baptism is, it in no case according to scripture produces so mighty a change; but life in Christ does, which the believer receives through the Spirit and the word of God. As its fulness and perfection were in the Son, so of His fulness did all we receive, and grace for grace. It is no presumption to believe God, nor what He declares He gives to those who receive Christ.

Let me beseech you, fellow-believer, not to slur over nor shirk the position in which the Lord sets you here below. These are His words:- "Ye are the salt of the earth ; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing save to be cast out and to be trodden down by men. Ye are the light of the world: a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do they light a lamp, and put it under the bushel but upon the stand, and it shineth for all that are in the house. Thus let your light shine before men, that they may see your comely works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens." Let us earnestly seek to make this good, instead of slipping it through or shoving it on to a Jewish remnant.

As there were two broad characteristics among the foregoing "blessed," righteousness and grace, both displayed in Christ and in Christianity, so is it with the position of the disciples. In vers. 3 to 6 are the righteous characters: in 7 to 9 the gracious: followed by the blessing of the persecuted for righteousness' sake in 10, and by those persecuted yet worse for Christ (*i.e.* grace) in 11, and their joy, exultation, and reward above in 12. The position too is presented accordingly. In ver. 13 we have the righteous side; in 14 and the rest the side of grace, but both to be verified in our practice.

Salt is the righteously preservative principle. It is sharp rather than sweet, but guards from impurity and decomposition. It gives fixity to what is good and wholesome. It proves all things, and holds fast the right. It keeps aloof from every form of wickedness. When then the disciples are called the salt of the earth, the Lord designates them as set apart to God the Father, and in patient continuance of good work seeking for glory and honour and incorruptibility at Christ's coming. They obey the truth, and are to hold fast what they have till then. If they lose the good savour, it is fatal. Saltless salt (and such a change was familiar in those lands) cannot be restored. It is not fit for anything but to be trodden down on the streets, as it often was.

How has it fared with the holy deposit in Christendom? Has the salt there retained its virtue? Did the favoured Gentile abide in goodness, any more than the Jew under law? If not, cutting off is the sentence of God (Rom. 11: 21, 22). All the more should every faithful soul humble himself, repent, and look to the Lord who is as willing as He is able to make Him stand.

But are we not responsible as "the light of the world"? If it is not the property or power of salt to cure corruption, it is for light to illuminate the dark. It goes out and around. And we may notice it is to "the world" at large here in this appropriate diffusion by grace, as the salt is "of the earth," the ordered scene of privileges. As being the light, it is compared to a city set on a hill and not to be hid; and not this only, but as penetrating the home, it is as a lamp (not absurdly under the bushel as its extinguisher, but) upon its stand, that all in the house may enjoy its brightness.

Only let us not forget the Lord's momentous caution as to this. "Thus let your light (your living profession of Him, Who is the true Light and made you light in Him) shine before men, that they may see (not your inconsistencies, but) your comely works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens." He means the very reverse of men displaying their benevolent works before their fellows, so as to bring glory to themselves. He would have His own let their confession of Him, the one source of their light, shine, so that men may see the goodly fruits, and therefore glorify not the disciples but our Father in the heavens, the Father of lights, of whom is every good giving, and whence comes down every perfect gift from above.

5 The Beatitudes

Matt. 5: 3-12.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 8-9. Gospel No. 11-5.)

In what is called the Sermon on the Mount the Lord does not treat either of new birth or of redemption. He addresses His disciples that came unto Him, and begins with pronouncing who are the blessed in the kingdom. It is a solemn test whereby every disciple may try himself.

"Blessed the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

Blessed they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

Blessed the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

Blessed the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

Blessed the peace-makers; for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

Blessed are ye when they shall reproach and persecute you, and falsely say every wicked word against you for my sake. Rejoice and exult; for your reward is great in the heavens; for thus persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

Such are the qualities, said the Lord, which suit the kingdom. They are not those of man fallen nor even unfallen. The first man in Paradise had none of them any more than the outcast race. "Ye must be born anew," and even then have your new character formed and impressed by the Lord Jesus. None other He owns (Matt. 7: 21-23), nor can others have to do with the Kingdom save for judgment. Those only do the will of His Father that is in the heavens. But the Saviour Son of God elsewhere shows, and is, the unfailing way. "As many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become children of God" (John 1: 12). Who are they? "Those that believe on His name." They are born of God. They have life eternal, and can each say, "I live, no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that which I now live in flesh I live by faith in the Son of God that loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2: 20). O, believe Him in Whom is life producing every quality God values! There is none other in His sight. Believe, and it is yours now; and with an evil nature in an evil world as is the fact, here it is indispensable as well as for heaven.

You, my brethren, may not have noticed that there are seven characters, all blessed in vers. 3-9, divided as after into four and three. Four righteous qualities are first, three gracious follow; and they rise respectively in each class. Christ manifested each and all in perfection. Those that follow Him, having Him as their life, must have His qualities reproduced and manifested in them.

Poor in spirit is the first named. It is just the opposite of fallen man's aspiring spirit. Outward forms of poverty will not do. Under that garb what pride may lurk, what self-seeking, what party spirit! "It shall not thus be among you, but whoever would be great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever would be first among you, let him be your slave" in this evil age and rebel world. Such was the Son of man in life and death. He is the disciple's example; for his is not a present place of honour but the kingdom of the heavens whether to faith now or displayed by-and-by.

And who was such a mourner where His Father was unknown, and His own light and love scorned? Here too the disciple treads in His steps and looks for the comfort wherewith He was comforted and comforts.

Next, as He was meek and lowly in heart, so must he be who takes His yoke and learns from Him, assured of inheriting that earth where the hard and haughty have now their brief portion.

The last of these are such as hunger and thirst after righteousness, which marks not only persevering energy but this in inward personal desire, and they shall have satisfying fruition in and like "Jesus Christ the Righteous."

After this, we have the higher characters of grace, but with righteousness preceding. As Jesus was full of grace and truth, so His followers not only exceed in their righteousness that of scribes and Pharisees, but show mercy not known to these. And truly they shall find mercy, as they have found it plenteously.

Theirs too is purity in heart, and as by faith they see God now, so shall they beyond others by-and-by (Rev. 22: 4).

In fine, they are the blessed peace-makers who now represent the God of peace; and His sons

shall such be called as they are.

But observe that the Lord reveals a supplemental blessedness for each of the two great classes. "Blessed they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake" answers to the opening class in 3-6, and so fitly repeats the opening blessing, "for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The last of the two rises to the highest, and leaves the abstract for direct personal words of love: "Blessed are ye when they shall reproach and persecute you, and falsely say every wicked word against you for my sake." This was suffering for grace in full. "Rejoice," says the Lord therefore, "and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets that were before you."

As Christ only is all-sufficient now for evil and lost man, if he believe, so in His day shall the poor in spirit have the true and abiding riches. What then must be the lot of all who despise Him?

6 Prayer for Disciples

Matt. 6: 9-13.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 20-22. Gospel No. 11-6.)

Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus? Are you born of the Spirit? Are you a child of God entitled to say Abba, Father? Such were they, and no others, whom the Lord taught to pray thus: Our Father that art in the heavens, Sanctified be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven also on the earth, Give us today our sufficient bread, and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors, and bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. If you are a disciple as they were, you too can pray thus, even if like them you could not say that you have in Christ redemption, the forgiveness of your trespasses (Eph. 1: 7). Such too was necessarily their state then, for Christ had not yet suffered for sins. But it ought not to be yours now; for the atoning work is done. If then you believe on the Lord Jesus, be it known to you, that through Him is (not promised, but) proclaimed to you remission of sins, and in Him is every believer justified from all things (Acts 13: 38, 39). You have not appreciated the alphabet of the gospel, if you know not that once purged you have no more conscience of sins.

While in this unformed condition, born of the Spirit but not resting on redemption known as yours (and therefore not yet having the Spirit of adoption, Gal. 4: 4-6, Eph. 1: 13), you do well to pray as the Lord taught His disciples. waiting for the Spirit (Luke 11: 1-3). When the Paraclete was given, they entered into peace and liberty, far beyond their then state (Rom. 5: 1-11, 2 Cor. 17, 18); and so may you prove when thus subject and obedient to God (Acts 5: 32). Nevertheless, though the standing of a Christian will lead you to pray in the Spirit according to the new relationships, how blessed ever is that which the Lord here taught! Do you really know what He meant? Many fail in this. Let us weigh His words.

It is in the First Gospel we hear of the Father who is in the heavens. The aim was to raise the eyes on high of Jews who were used to wait for God to display His glorious power on earth (Isa. 25: 9, 31: 4; Isa. 35: 4. etc.), as He did in measure since the day of redemption from the old house of bondage. Now He is made known as the One who makes His Sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust, yet with special favour to His sons.

The petitions are seven, and divide into two classes; the first three are of righteousness, as the last four are of grace. This is an order intrinsically due to God, and proper for saints. If lost sinners as such were contemplated, all must begin with sovereign grace. But of this we hear not in the so-called sermon on the Mount, but such grace shines appropriately elsewhere.

1. And how right, even our hearts feel, is the opening petition, Sanctified be thy name! It is the foremost desire of the renewed, however young in faith. Without this made good, there can be nothing good.

2. Thy (not My) Kingdom come, the Father's Kingdom (Matt. 13: 43) where the heavenly saints shine forth as the sun in risen glory, the dearest object of His love here as Father, Who will have them there with and as Christ, through Whom alone it could be.

3. Thy will be done as in heaven also on the earth. This is at the same time the Son of man's Kingdom, Who will send His angels to gather out of it all offences and all that work lawlessness (Matt. 13: 41). It is the earthly things of God's Kingdom, as the other the heavenly (John 3: 12), Christ being Head of the church and over all things (Eph. 1: 10, 22).

Then come the petitions of grace.

4. Give us today our sufficient (or, necessary) bread. Thus are they taught to begin with confessing dependence for ordinary wants, as the apostle called us to be content with food and raiment.

5. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. For indeed all saints are bound to judge self and confess sins, as an antecedent spirit of forgiveness is imperative. See Matt. 18: 35, Luke 17: 3, 4.

6. And bring us not into temptation. So the Lord impresses on the disciples; for He ever knew their weakness as none else did yet. Luke 22: 46. To "endure" temptation is as blessed, as "entering into" it is full of danger.

7. But deliver us from evil in general, if not from the evil one in particular. This was not the sifting, or temptation, deprecated in the clause before, which grace may put us through for good, as we see in Peter; but the power of the enemy in drawing into sin against God. The proper desire was to be kept from the evil, or, if one fell, to be restored from it. Grace in no case fails, if a disciple alas! did. Deliver us from evil.

The doxology is an ecclesiastical accretion and therefore uninspired. Luke was led by the Holy Spirit to omit the special title (2), the earthly Kingdom (3), and the final clause (7), as not so much called for in the case of Gentiles.

Reader, can your state admit of your adopting the prayer for a disciple of Jesus? How sad to use it lightly and untruly!

7 Grace in Practice

Matt. 5: 38-48.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 37-38. Gospel No. 11-7.)

There is nothing that comes before the eyes of men which strikes them more than the meek, lowly, thankful spirit which endures a wrong. The natural man resents, and, if he can, avenges everything of the sort. You might as well tell him to feel otherwise, as to walk in the air a mile or a foot above the ground. To the disciple such grace is a principle of his new life. It is what in its perfection he has beheld in Christ, and what suits his Father who is in the heavens and looks for the reproduction of His own character in His sons. Retaliation is here reversed and uprooted.

"Ye have heard that it was said, Eye for eye, and tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Resist not

evil; but whoever shall strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to him that would go to law with thee and take thy coat, leave him to take thy cloak also. And whoever will impress thee one mile, go with him two. To him that asketh thee give, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away.

"Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you, that ye may be sons of your Father that is in the heavens; for he maketh his Sun rise on evil and good, and sendeth rain on just and unjust. For if ye should love those that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the taxgatherers the same? And if ye should salute your brethren only, what beyond do ye? Do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

It may be personal lawlessness, an unjust suit, or a hard law; but the disciple of Christ is taught by the Master to bow. What is a brutal insult compared with truly representing Him? Consistency with Him is far more than one's coat, and cloak to boot. Instead of begrudging the service pressed for one mile, add another to please Him who would have us walk by faith, not by sight, still less selfishly. Luke, who was led to note not the legal side but unauthorised violence only, omits the impressment, and inverts the stripping by letting the plunderer take the inner garment as well as the outer, the Lord no doubt exhorting to both. Nor did He end here, but bade the disciple give habitually to him that asked; for what had not he himself received from the divine Giver beyond all he asked? The object of countless and rich mercies, was he to turn away from one that would ask or borrow?

But the Lord goes farther in His next utterance. Whatever was said of loving one's neighbour and hating one's enemy, His word to His disciples was and is, Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you. So too the Epistles insist on those that bear His name. In the Gospel of Luke rightly stand the clauses, Bless those that curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray also for those that use you despitefully. These enlarge the grace which disciples are exhorted to show to hostile man of the world; and from thence they were imported into the copies of Matthew by scribes who were prone to assimilate. The inspiring Spirit was pleased through James to urge loving our enemies, and praying for our persecutors, which last pertained to Jews pre-eminently, because of their hot and proud religious prejudice in the flesh.

Such love and piety, to be of value, must be no mere form but a living reality, that they might be sons of their Father in the heavens; for such is their place of dignity. And what a pattern He sets! For He makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. What rich grace in the first comparison, and what faithful goodness in the second!

Nor was the Lord content with the pointed reference to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God. He would make them ashamed, as His disciples, of not rising above the practice of Jews and Gentiles. If they loved those that loved them, did not the odious tax-gatherers the same? If they greeted their brethren only, the scorned Gentiles did also the same. This was altogether beneath the Christian according to Christ. "Ye shall be therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." A lower standard of feeling and conduct was to the Saviour intolerable.

Have we such confidence by grace toward God? Assuredly we have no competency as of ourselves: but our competency is of God, according to the spirit of the new covenant, not of the old. The grace of Christ alone suffices the believer. If you reject Him, you are lost. Flee to this the only refuge, if you would be saved; flee to Jesus now, ere the House-master shuts the door, when "Lord, open to us" will be in vain. Then will He judge strictly, instead of saying as He does now in all grace; then will He say, I know not whence ye are: depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.

8 Treasures?

Matt. 6: 19-21.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 53-54. Gospel No. 11-8.)

Christ beyond all others knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He Himself knew what was in man. He seeks treasures on the earth. It may not be gold or property. It may be pleasure or power or position. Some set their heart on fame in letters or learning, in science or art. Some court poetry, oratory, or philosophy. The bar and the bench, the army or the navy, civil government or politics, philanthropy or even the pulpit ordinarily, fire the ambition of others. These objects and all akin which attract the heart of man are treasures on the earth, and beneath the faith to which the Christian is called — faith in God unseen and eternal. "Love not the world," wrote His inspired servant, "nor the things that are in the world. If any one loveth 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 vain-glory of life, is not of the Father but 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).

Listen to the Saviour's words on the more prevailing snare. "Lay not up for you treasures on the earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves dig through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupteth, and where thieves dig not through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there will be thy heart also."

The treasures in heaven are the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. On these things we are to set our mind, not on things that are on the earth. For we died with Christ from its best things, the rudiments of the world which Israel had as their religion; and our life is hid with Christ in God. His cross closed all such shadows and ordinances; and therefore is the world crucified to the Christian, and he to the world. If he is truly Christ's, he is heavenly as united to Christ, though he is still on earth, and bears the image of Adam the earthy till He comes.

Be not moved by the unbelieving sneers of those who try to lower as other-worldliness your true objects. These are far above the world, or the habitable earth to come, blessed as it will be when Christ and His saints reign over it. Our proper portion is in heaven and with Christ there. Be not cheated out of that which is revealed to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, on which the Epistles enlarge beyond what the disciples could bear when their Master was here, as He Himself tells us (John 16: 12).

The wisest of mankind is no judge of what God wills for His children now. The New Testament is as clear as possible that He would have His own not of the world; indeed our Lord declares that they are not, even as He is not. And as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatever things God prepared for those that love Him: them God revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. These are treasures which the Lord calls us to lay up for us in heaven. And nothing can harm them, like earthly treasures by corruption or violence.

Do not say that such an aim is beyond the believer. It would be assuredly, if there were not the grace of God to enable. But we have Christ as Head above, from Whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God. His grace suffices one in the most crushing circumstances. And if we have such an Advocate on high, we have One no less divine to work in us here below that we may be strengthened in the inner man. Thus could one of old boast of weaknesses, never of sins, that the power of Christ might tabernacle upon him.

If you urge that you have doubts about your soul, how can you pass this day without settling that question before God? He sent His Son for you, that you might live through Him, and that He, the Lord Jesus, might die for you — yea, for your sins. Let it be your need, your guilt, your ruin, looking to God in the name of the crucified Saviour. Jesus never said Nay to one that, feeling his sins, appealed to Him. God the Father would have you thus honour the Son, who declares solemnly: Verily, Verily, I say to you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, *hath* life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but *is passed* out of death into life. Verily, verily, I say to you, The hour is coming *and now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that heard shall live." Be not faithless then, but believing; trust His grace that all else you lack, as you surely do, will be given in the like love. It is His joy to bless the believer.

9 Christ come to fulfil

Matt. 5: 17. 18.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 70-71. Gospel No. 11-9.)

From the outset of His ministry our Lord was careful to affirm that He came not to dissolve but to make good divine authority in the law or the prophets. In both He was predicted as the One whom all blessing depended. He only could deliver sinful and seduced man. He was to be the Sacrifice which would justify all previous offerings to God, and render their just interpretation, and furnish their efficacy. Fulfilment of a prophecy is the same word; but the context here points to a larger scope.

The law and the prophets testified to man's unrighteousness and to God's righteousness (Rom. 3: 21). But they could not do more. Christ came, not to enfeeble or undo them as His blind enemies thought, but to make good that divine testimony which left the sinner without excuse and gave what God only in His grace could supply. It was far more than even pious men conceived, a mere making up, by His obedience of the law, what men failed in. This had merely been man's righteousness accomplished by Him for the unrighteous, Here too He has done incomparably more and better. He laid the basis in His obedience unto death for God's righteousness, that God might be just and justify him that believes on Jesus. For He who knew no sin glorified God in being made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Hence God's grace is enhanced, not frustrated; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died gratuitously. But it is not so: never was anything else contemplated or revealed but that the believers rest their hope on His death.

God took care therefore that promise should long precede and exist independently of it, as the apostle argues in Gal. 3. This at Sinai Israel in their self-confidence overlooked. Instead of asking for the unconditional promise of grace they undertook to stand on their own obedience. As no sinful man can subsist on such a condition, the law written on stones, even when brought down a second time with types of mercy accompanying, could not but be a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3: 7-9). For them it is said in the reading of the old covenant the veil remains unremoved; and the veil is more than on the face, being upon their heart. They did and do not look to Christ, law's end for righteousness to every one that believes. They strove to stand on a mixture of law and grace, which only adds to the sinner's condemnation, because the added grace increases his guilt if disobedient. But we look on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face and are transformed to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit, Who testifies to Him in the glory of God as the fruit not only of His person but of His work. And so the apostle preached the gospel of God's grace and of Christ's glory, as he had been converted.

The Epistle to the Hebrews told the Christian Jews that the "new" covenant of which Jeremiah bore witness held out under Christ a better covenant. It did not, like the old at Sinai, depend on Israel as the party on whose fidelity blessing depended. All hung for the new covenant on the Lord's sovereign grace. "Because this is the covenant that I will covenant for the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: giving my laws into their mind, I will also inscribe them on their hearts; and I will be to them for God, and they shall be to me for people. And they shall in no wise teach, each his fellow-citizen and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord; because all shall consciously know from little of them unto great Of them; because I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses and their sins, and their lawlessnesses I will remember no more" (Heb. 8: 10-12).

This was no real way to set aside the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them to God's glory and for man's salvation and blessing. Christ filled up the gap between God and the sinner for him who believes on Him. The law pointed to Him as the coming One who alone could restore the balance which the creature's evil had disturbed by weight overwhelming to all but the Saviour. He alone could by redemption win and give the blessing which God's nature loved to bestow and God's counsels assured in due time. But all this and more Christ was by His word and Spirit bringing in a new and divine life by faith into the soul, before the day arrives when He will transform our body of humiliation into conformity with His body of glory according to the working of His power even to subdue all things to Himself. It was not mere addition, as if the law and the prophets were not intrinsically complete and perfect for the end God proposed; but He is throughout assumed and predicted as essential to give the blessed result. "For verily I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all come to pass" (vers. 18).

So even the N.T. speaks of filling up the gap otherwise left in it by the revelation of the mystery of Christ's headship on high and the church united to Him as His body. And the apostle in Col. 1: 25 tells us of the stewardship of God given Him thereby to complete His word. For this was a secret hidden from ages and generations, and quite distinct from the kingdom, the new covenant, or the inheritance of Abraham's promise. It was a promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel and God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3: 6, 10).

O dear reader, look you by faith to Jesus, the sole accomplisher of what you most want and of infinitely more — what glorifies God and gives the believer a wondrous part in it all. Look not to yourself save to condemn yourself; look to Him who secures from all condemnation which you must otherwise dread. May your heart learn how truly Christ is all. This no man is willing to do, until he is brought to the decided conviction before God, that he is lost, and that in him (that is, in his flesh) good does not dwell.

10 The Father in secret

Matt. 6: 1-18.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 88-89. Gospel No. 11-10.)

Here is a Christian principle, which our Lord puts in contrast with acting so as to be seen. What so suited to exercise and strengthen faith day by day, or to guard from that hypocrisy to which man is prone?

He first lays down the general principle, it would seem, in verse 1, and then applies it to alms in 2-4; to prayer in 5-15; and lastly to fasting in 16-18. Some ancients and moderns have been disposed to regard "righteousness" in verse 1, as equivalent to "alms," as Rabbis and others were prone to do.

But the better text and sense point to retaining the inclusive term "righteousness" in verse 1, under which fall the three duties that follow. For if applied there to "alms," it is hard to conceive why the proper term for "alms" should be given in 2, 3, and 4. The different word in verse 1 points to the more comprehensive sense of "righteousness" or consistency in practice with our relationship. This is then shown to embrace three varied forms in which the disciple is called to do the Father's will in the pious course of life here below. Dan. 4: 27 distinguishes mercy to the poor from righteousness; and I am not aware of any confusion of the two in scripture.

Verse 1 calls the disciple to righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees, without which none can enter into the Kingdom of the heavens. "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward with your Father that is in the heavens." Here is the large principle for Christian practice. Knowing Him as Christ has revealed Him to us, all acceptable service refers to Him, He is a living and true God whom we serve, and He refuses to share His glory with others. We walk by faith, not by sight. Can anything be more opposite to the ways of Christendom?

1. When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be glorified by men: Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father that seeth in secret will repay to thee" (2-4). If men walk in a vain show religiously quite as much as in the world, the Lord calls His own to shun publicity, and not merely this, but in His vigorous figure, that our own left hand may not know what the right does. The simple and essential aim is to do what we do to Him and His glory.

2. So it is with the prayer here enjoined. "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they should appear to men. Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father that is in secret, and thy Father that seeth in secret will repay to thee. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as those of the nations; for they think they shall be heard through their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like them; for your Father knoweth of what things ye have need before ye beg of him. . . . For if ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father also will forgive you [yours]; but if ye forgive not men their offences, neither will your Father forgive your offences" (5-15).

Here the same show before men in prayer is reprehended; nor this only, but the heathen folly of vain repetitions, and of much speaking. Lastly the Lord warns that an unforgiving spirit cannot hope to have its own offences forgiven.

3. "And when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, downcast in countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear fasting to men. Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But thou, when fasting, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou mayest not appear fasting to men, but to thy Father that is in secret; and thy Father that seeth in secret shall repay thee" (16-18).

In fasting there is even more sedulous care to guard from any display of that self-humiliation before God which forms so great a part of it. The Lord would form in His own a spirit of living faith in having to do with their Father. Fasting is for His eyes, just like their prayer and their alms. Faith in Him that is in secret is thus in each way exercised. What a contrast with all that hitherto characterised a Jew!

11 The Lamp of the Body

"The lamp of the body is the eye." Matt. 6: 22, 23.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 102-103. Gospel No. 11-11.)

That Christ, is the Light, and the True Light, is a truth dear to every Christian. He coming into the world manifests every man. Rich or poor, simple or sage, false or faithful, not one escapes His all-searching light. Nor is there the least circumstance in the course of every day, any more than in what pertains to God, and truth, and morals, not for this life only but for eternity, that He does not set in the light of God. Only through Him do we see fully what God is, Satan, man, the sinner, the saint, heaven, hell, everything.

The disciples, as the Lord told them in Matt. 5: 14, are the light of the world, as they are also the salt of the earth (13). They could be neither apart from Christ. It is He who thus assimilates them to Himself; the latter in His character of righteousness, the former in the quality of His grace, as already explained in Series 11-4. In receiving Him by faith they receive a new nature, being born of God; hence there is both righteousness and love in their ways.

But here there is a further though connected truth of great value.

"The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light; but if thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark. If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great the darkness!"

It is a question not of the light, which is perfect but of "the eye." Spiritual condition has an immense deal to do with the disciples seeing aright. Our reciprocity and discernment, our actual judgment and our practice, depend on the state of our affections. The Lord presents the ready and effectual test. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light; but if thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark."

Christ truly the object before one gives singleness of eye; and where He is simply and exclusively the "one thing" before the soul, the whole body is light. Difficulties vanish. The will of God becomes quite clear. I am surprised and ashamed to have had doubts here and uncertainty there. I recognise to my humiliation that I had been asleep in my ways and had to rise up from among the dead, and then only have Christ shining upon me.

Prayer alone does not ensure singleness of eye, nor yet suffices searching the word accompanied by prayer. There may be a fleshly film that dims the eye. We are too apt to think ourselves of importance for God when it is all of grace that He uses us in this way or that. We fail to appreciate our Lord's waiting on His Father, without taking a single step till He gets the word. Yet it is to His obedience that we are sanctified by the Spirit.

We are not like Jews with every point great or small religiously and in ordinary life, in peace or in war, personal, domestic, or social, all ruled by the statutes and ordinances, prohibitions and injunctions of law. Christ brought in the fuller and deeper obedience of a Son, and makes it by grace the believer's by the gift of life eternal and eternal redemption, with the Holy Spirit indwelling as power and personally also in us. But though thus blessed, there are still the three great enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil, in the face of which we are responsible to please God as His children. We need therefore to pray, as the apostle did for the Colossians, to be filled with the right knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the right knowledge of God (Col. 1: 9, 10).

For this we need the eye single and the whole body light. How is this to be? The Lord tells us in John 15: 7: "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done to you." Habitual dependence on Him with confidence in His love is to abide in Him: without this all else is vain. But where we abide by grace, His words are needed to direct: for who is sufficient otherwise? and His Spirit is given to guide us thus. Only thus are we sure that we have His mind; for thus the eye is single and the whole body light. Then when we ask, we have our petition. Oh, that so it may be I and that we may be content with nothing less!

What is the issue, where other objects are allowed? The alternative is, "If thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark." How solemn the sentence, and how true! "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great the darkness!" Oh, look to God that it be not so with you, a disciple of the Lord!

See too the impossibility of the Light yours, of the eye single, save by genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus. Doubt yourself, not God; and receive Him who in His grace came to receive you by faith, if you have not already done so.

12 Be not anxious.

Matt. 6: 25-32.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 121-122. Gospel No. 11-12.)

As the Lord charges His own to lay up for them. selves treasures, not on earth, but in heaven, so does He forbid anxiety about their life here below, as His servant did about anything. He lifts our eyes above the seen present to the things unseen and eternal, whence He came and whither He was going, as He is coming to take us shortly. Here He deals with the believer's heart, and the snare of seeking to serve God and mammon which He pronounces morally impossible.

"For this reason I say to you, Be not anxious for your life what ye should eat and what ye should drink, nor yet for your body what ye should put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the raiment? Look at the birds of the heavens, that they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father nourisheth them. Are ye not more excellent than they? And which of you by anxiety can add to his stature one cubit? And why are ye anxious about raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they toil not, nor yet spin; yet I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory put on like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, being today and tomorrow cast into the oven, how much more you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we put on? For all these things the Gentiles seek after; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (6: 25-32).

Anxiety as to the things which the present life needs is natural. All these things the nations of the earth seek after. In God they have no faith, as the Jews professed loudly, but in works denied. But the disciples had the heavenly Father's name now set before them as the One who is perfect in grace, making His sun shine on evil and good, and sending rain on just and unjust. How true this is! Yet who had affirmed it as a living principle but the Lord on earth, who also set it forth as a model for His own practically, that they might be sons indeed: an astonishing doctrine, especially for those, as they were, trained up in the legal ideas of the Jews. So their righteousness was to be, whether alms, prayer, and fasting, not before men but to their Father that sees in secret.

The name of their Father made anxiety about earthly and bodily wants a painful incongruity, and in particular about what kind the supply should be. From Himself the birds read them one lesson, and the

lilies another. He nourishes each fleeting creature, He gives the passing flower its beauty. How much more did He care for His children? It was a touching appeal and carrying with it to every believer the conviction of irresistible truth. They were, they are, called to believe in His sustaining goodness. He never fails in His love: they ought not to fail in resting and counting on it day by day. If tried as to it, let them not doubt that it is for their good. It is impossible for God to lie. Are they to doubt His love Whom the Lord reveals as their Father? He who embraces the least objects of His care will act worthily of His love to the nearest.

Nor does the Lord spare them the humbling proof how little the anxiety of man avails. "Which of you by anxiety can add to his stature one cubit?" It was a very small thing if some would count it a very great addition. Yet even for this how powerless is man! Why then be anxious about a garment? The herbage of the field rebukes the vanity of a child of God; for as the Lord called their attention to the lilies, he pointed the moral by the plain fact that God clothed even these transient creatures, lower in the scale than the birds, with a beauty far beyond Solomon's array in all his glory.

Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we put on? Here the Lord urges two considerations which we do well to heed. One is to guard us against sharing the unbelief of those who do not even know God, How compromising to share the thoughts and feelings of the Gentiles! "For all these things the nations seek after." The other is to assure the doubting heart. "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," "Not one sparrow falls to the ground without Him: but of you even the hairs of the head are all numbered" (Matt. 10: 29, 30).

Now are you, who read these words, a child of God by grace? Believe not such as say that all mankind are so. They deny the fall; they ignore sin; they oppose the solemn testimony of scripture, that, however favoured by privileges, we are by nature children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2: 3). Believe not others who say that baptism quickens those dead in trespasses and sins. Christ quickens by faith of His word and the working of the Spirit. He is the Life, as He is the Way and the Truth. You have His words, not merely to instruct His own, but to show how the dead may live, yea have eternal life; for this it is He gives to those who believe. "Verily, verily, I say to you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life " (John 6: 47). Why wonder? Is He not the Son, the *I am*? "He that believeth on the Son hath life eternal (or, everlasting): and he that is unsubject to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 36). O sinner, beware lest this be your portion.