

Gospel Words — Twelfth Series.

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

1 The Kingdom of God

Matt. 6: 33, 34.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 135-136. Gospel No. 12-1.)

The kingdom of the heavens is an expression derived apparently from Dan. 4: 26. Its inauguration also is foreshown in Dan. 7: 13, 14; in 22 not only the Heir of all but the heavenly joint-heirs, and in 27 the "people" under the whole heaven to whom the chief dominion is given. Such will be the manifested kingdom when the Son of man comes with power and glory; and there will be earthly things and heavenly (John 3: 12). But He came first as the great moral. test in humiliation; and His rejection and cross brought out higher than earth through redemption therein accomplished. This too, refused by the unbelieving people, left the door open for the mystery of that kingdom and its mysteries while the rejected King is on high, and the gospel of indiscriminate grace, till the church is complete. Then all Israel shall be saved on their repentance, and the blessing of all the nations as such shall fully come.

Plainly, "the kingdom of the heavens" is a dispensational phrase peculiar to the first Gospel, as in contrast with the incredulity of the Jews who looked only for an earthly one. Mark and Luke use "the kingdom of God" for it, and in a general sense; John exclusively for what is real. But Matthew, for that very reason, when he does say "the kingdom of God," does not mean the dispensational view, either in future manifestation or in present mystery, but the power of God ruling in Christ when here, or now in the Spirit's action morally in those that are His. Hence the same term which is so comprehensive elsewhere has here this force all the more marked because of Matthew's general employment of the dispensational phrase

Here occurs the first instance; the others are, Matt. 12: 28, Matt. 19: 24, Matt. 21: 31, 43, of which this is not the place to speak more particularly.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Be not careful (or, anxious) for the morrow for the morrow will be careful about itself: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

Throughout the discourses on the Mount the Lord is not preaching the glad tidings to the lost but instructing His disciples who already believed. Earthly care is a great bane and unworthy of faith. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Where could they find that kingdom and righteousness most truly, plainly, and fully set out before their souls? Surely nowhere as in Himself. It was even more wondrously by God's Spirit in His moral power than by His casting out demons. "Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God," was far beyond all the miracles together that ever had been wrought. Who but He was the "man that lived by every word of God" unswervingly?

Nor is it too much to ask of such as were born of God. Indeed the principle was always true. Jehovah's people were to be holy because He is holy. And this applies all the more strongly now that we have the relationship of sons, with redemption through Christ's blood, and the gift of the Spirit. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking; nor yet abstinence from flesh or wine; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Making God's kingdom and righteousness our first concern, we are entitled to expect that all the things needful and good will be added to us. For our God and Father never overlooks our wants. If faithful in the greatest and deepest things, He loves that we should confide in Him as to our least things. Do we believe the Lord, that "all these things [about which unbelief worries] shall be added unto us?" Let us not forget the condition: "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." What can be more due to God, or more comely for us as His sons? The Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

It is unbelief, accompanied by loving the world or the things in the world, which produces anxiety, darkness, and doubt, as in the Gentiles who knew not God. If we know Him, and the blessedness of His kingdom, and the perfection of His righteousness, why be careful for the morrow? For the morrow, says the Lord, shall be careful for itself. Has He failed us today, or in the past? What evil has He ever done us, what good thing withheld from us? Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Even if the hardest trials come, do we not know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those called according to purpose?

Do you, my reader, say that you love Him not, but dread Him because of your sins? Then why do you not flee for refuge to Him that stretches out to you His strong and gracious arms? Come unto Me, He cries, all ye that labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. He is full of grace and truth. Is not this the only Saviour for a sinner? What does "grace" mean but unmerited favour? You are justly condemned if you refuse to come at God's word.

2 Judge not

"Judge not that ye be not judged." Matt. 7: 1-6.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 149-150. Gospel No. 12-2.)

There ought to be no question of the Lord's meaning here. No fault was more prevalent then or now. Censoriousness is not only the habitual bane of religious professors, but the snare to which true disciples are too prone. Gracious men who set their face in general against detraction are often bitter against what they themselves dislike, and thus slip into judging motives wrongly like others. He who is Judge of quick and dead discerns every heart, and enjoins what is comely and just on His followers. For

this sin tends to hypocrisy; and what saint would regard such a thing lightly?

"Judge not that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you. And why lookest thou on the mote that [is] in the eye of thy brother, but observest not the beam in thine eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote from thine eye; and, behold, the beam [is] in thine eye? Hypocrite, pull out first the beam out of thine eye, and then wilt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of the eye of thy brother."

The indulgence in a hasty, severe, and suspicious spirit provokes reprisals, and such as wantonly impute evil to others in ignorance or unkindness do not fail to bring on themselves unsparing imputation. For here the Lord turns from the lack of confiding in our Father's care and love, and warns of our danger from many an unkind impression and expression. To surmise wrong motives is itself a wrong. It is natural for such as live in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another; and such once were we ourselves. But since the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared (no premium for our deserts), but according to His own mercy He saved us through washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, are we not bound by the family character, the new life relationship as children of God, sons of such a Father? Since redemption and the gift of the Spirit, more can be added now to what the Lord uttered then.

But He reminds us of what we easily forget. If others are a trial to us, are not we a trial to them? Are we not, unless walking according to the light, as dull to see our own faults as we are sharp to notice, and even imagine, wrongs in our brethren? How pungently the Lord puts the case that we may loathe ourselves! "And why lookest thou on the mote in the eye of thy brother, but observest not the beam in thine eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote from thine eye, and, behold, the beam is in thine eye?" The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls thus holily strips us of the mask which failure in self-judgment puts on. For if before God we discern not our own grievous shortcomings and sins, we do not know our brethren with anything like the same certainty and clearness. Love therefore and the fear of God call us each to deem others better than ourselves, judging ourselves for what we do know instead of others for what we know not and ought not to think. "Hypocrite," says the Lord with severe reproof, "pull out first the beam out of thine eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Yet it is well to beware of the too common misuse of our Lord's warning. How often pious persons thereby deprecate any censure of their own position and any care against false doctrine, or evil associations, or responsibility for such discipline as scripture requires! But this is to fail in godliness; which assuredly covers not only personal conduct, but also public walk as members of Christ. The Corinthians were careless in this way and others, which grace has turned to the profit, not only of them, but of "all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours." The apostle allows no excuse for carelessness congregationally any more than individually. There is no call to exercise discipline on the evildoers of the world; but Christians have the obligation of dealing with offenders in God's assembly. Paul, though absent, could not but judge that the wicked person should be excluded. It was due to Christ and His sacrifice. God must be vindicated Whose is the assembly. The saints were bound to clear themselves in the matter, taking up the offender's sin as their own; yet even here his ultimate good was sought, "that the spirit might he saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." "Do not ye judge those that are within? But those without God judgeth. Put away the wicked [man] from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5: 3-13). Here we are commanded to judge.

The selfsame principle expressly applies to sins far less gross. Our thoughts and reasonings are to

be discarded on the one hand; and on the other God's authority to be recognised and conclusive. Scripture too is plain that, important as is right judgment of moral evil, the truth is yet more momentous; and this both because to slight and oppose it offends against the Giver, and it ruins those who thus err, whilst they have a fair appearance, instead of shocking men like immorality or unrighteousness.

Express injunction is also laid down, when the evil is of a more general and public character, as in 2 Tim. 2. "Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth those that are his; and, Let everyone that nameth the Lord's name depart from unrighteousness. Now in a great house are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some for honour and some for dishonour. If one therefore purge himself out from these, he shall be a vessel for honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work." There is thus no licence to join in what God disapproves and demands us to judge. Conscience, a purged conscience, is exercised, and the heart all the more free to love fervently according to God,

But how is it with you, dear reader? If you are of the world and only bear the outward badge of Christianity, take the place of truth for your soul in God's sight. Jesus is the all-sufficient Saviour of sinners, and He, the Lord of all, is rich and near to all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call on the Lord's name shall be saved. Righteousness and salvation are the portion assured by God to each that believes and confesses Him. If you received Christ, say not that you cannot tell who are His. How then can you love God's children, as Christ charged you to do? Even the unconverted know in a general way who are His, and who are not; how much more does every sober believer? He owns that, till born anew and brought to God by Christ's work, he was as evil as anyone; and, without pretending to judge the heart, he accepts those who confess the Lord and follow Him, as he himself does. Such is the judgment of true charity, not the indifference of unbelief which is of Satan.

The verse that follows itself shows whom we ought to judge. For we are to prove all things, holding fast the right. "Dogs" and "Swine" we are bound to discern and disown. "Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine lest they trample them with their feet, and turn and rend you." Nabal's family is not extinct, sons of Belial with whom a disciple cannot speak with impunity. Shamelessness and filth plainly tell what they are, and the folly of treating them as sheep of God's pasture. No doubt the grace of God can save such: but in all this discourse is not a word about redemption or saving sinners. All throughout consists of the characters which suit God, and must really be for His Kingdom. This is its design: and it is worthy of Christ, as the gospel is where this was the question.

3 Confidence

Confidence in our Father's giving.

Matt. 7: 7-12.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 164-165. Gospel No. 12-3.)

Our Lord here encourages His disciples to count on the goodness of their Father for every want consistent with His will.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to 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, who, if his son shall ask of him for a loaf, will give him a stone; and if he ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If therefore ye, being wicked, know to give good gifts

to your children, how much rather shall your Father that is in the heavens give good things to those that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye desire that men should do to you, thus do ye also to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7: 7-12).

It is not a sinner needing life and forgiveness of his sins, but saints directed to appeal to God and assured of their Father's answer of love, whatever their wants be. The Lord had already taught it them to pray in Matt. 6 as with alms and fasting, parts of saintly righteousness and due to His name and glory. Here He enforces it as the way in which all they need from above is to be given them. Hence perseverance and earnestness are incumbent. Asking will ensure receiving, yea to every one that asks; seeking will not be fruitless but shall find; and to the still more importunate the door will be opened, which is but shut to exercise faith.

For there may be a matter of importance for the applicant to learn before the request can be granted, as with the Syro-phenician woman, so earnest in supplicating the Lord to have pity on her, whose daughter was grievously possessed by a demon. Yet at first the Lord answered her not a word. She pleaded like a lost sheep of Israel's house; whereas she was a Greek, and had no right of promise with the Messiah; indeed she was a Canaanite, and thus under the curse. But when she drops His title as Son of David, and gathered from His answer to the disciples wherein her mistake lay, she did Him homage, saying, Lord, help me. On this He speaks out, It is not good to take the bread of the children, and cast it to the whelps. This did help her soul, for it led her to the secret of sovereign grace on which she at once threw herself, saying, Yea, Lord; for even the whelps eat of the crumbs which fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus answering said to her, O woman, great is thy faith ; be it done to thee as thou wilt. The door opened to her knock. She was deepened and cleared in her faith, as her daughter was healed from that hour.

The Lord also encourages His disciples through the affection which is implanted in a parent's heart. If their Father makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust, how does He feel toward His sons? His love surely goes out to them in every request that is for their good, and withholds only what their foolishness asked that must do them harm. Hence He says, Or what man of you, whom his son shall ask for a loaf, will he give him a stone? and if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? Who would not repudiate such mockery of a son's hunger? Thence He draws the conclusive words for their hearts, If ye then, being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father that is in the heavens give good things to those that ask Him?

The last verse goes into that which becomes the disciple with men, and lays down the simple but evidently sound principle, to do to others as we would have others do to us; and this too on no ground of human rights or natural benevolence, but of consistency with God's revealed will. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, thus also do ye to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

Now let me ask you, dear reader, if you have not by faith the Son of God as your Saviour, are you not conscious that these words are altogether beyond you? What is your state then now, and what must the end be? I call on you in the Lord's name that you perish not in your sins. The same Lord, who thus cheers His disciples and bids them ask freely, warns you that he who disbelieves (who is unsubject to) the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him. Go to God as you are, a poor sinner, in the Saviour's name, and own your ruin and His grace, that you may be saved, and know it to your exceeding and everlasting joy; and then serve Him as your Lord, awaiting Him from heaven, for He is coming.

4 The Narrow Gate

Matt. 7: 13, 14.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 180-181. Gospel No. 12-4.)

The Lord here gives a warning of great practical value. Public opinion weighs much with the natural mind. It maybe and often is right in material things: there men judge fairly well, and are awake to their interests. For the spirit of man that is in him knows the things of man. But it is not so in the things of God, where the carnal mind does not fail to display its inveterate enmity against Him to man's certain ruin if it sway. Therefore is it elsewhere written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God. All turned aside, together they become unprofitable, there is none doing good, no, not one (Rom. 3: 10-12).

Hence the Lord says here, "Enter ye through the narrow gate; because wide [is] the gate, and broad the way that leadeth off unto destruction, and many are they that enter through it. Because narrow [is] the gate, and straitened the way that leadeth off unto life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. 7: 13, 14).

Reader, how is it with you? Have you entered through the narrow gate of conversion to God? Have you repented toward God and believed on our Lord Jesus Christ? Baptism is the divine and admirable sign of salvation; yet it never gave life, but rather represented remission of sins and death to sin for such as had life : if they had not life in Christ, its true meaning, as far as they were concerned, was their guilty and wretched inconsistency, to their utter condemnation far worse than if they had not been baptised to that excellent Name. Deceive not your own soul; he not deceived by others. The great apostle warned that in the last days grievous times should come, and evil men and impostors wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But this trust in an ordinance is one of the oldest of errors, and revived of late with fresh audacity and large success, though the same apostle expressly denounced its vanity and danger in early days (1 Cor. 10: 1-11). For "our fathers," said he, "were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink . . . Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness . . . Now all these things happened to them as types, and were written for our admonition on whom the ends of the ages are come."

O unbeliever, will it assuage the horrors of everlasting fire that you followed the multitude in despising the word of the Lord and neglecting His great salvation? You cannot deny that what He says here is very plain; your conscience must own that it is true. It is of no avail to talk about the fate of Tibet sealed up against the light of the gospel, or to enquire what is to become of the heathen millions in darkest Africa, or in haughtier India and China, or anywhere else. You at any rate have the Bible, and may outwardly profess the Lord's name. You have often heard and perhaps read these words of Him who will surely judge living and dead; and the time hastens for it. When you stand and are manifested before Him, will you not be speechless, like him who might be christened but had no wedding garment? The numberless crowds of the lost will verify His words, but yield not a drop of water to cool your tongue in the torments of that day without an end, or even when you die impenitent now before it come. Masses and classes alike perish in their unbelief of Him and His word.

In fact it will only add unspeakably to your bitter self-reproach that the Lord gave you so distinct a signal of danger for time and eternity. You refused the narrow gate, because it admitted neither self-will, nor fleshly lust. You loved the wide gate and the broad way, because you set your heart on what you called liberty, seeking and doing what you liked in defiance of God's will. You stifled the

conviction of your moral folly and incredulous madness by the abundance of your company high and low. The narrow gate was repulsive to you, because it compelled you to stoop to God, which your pride and your passions alike resented. You had in entering through it to meet God singly, and to face Him alone about your sins. Had you been in earnest, you would have seen that He is our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to acknowledgement of truth. And this is solely in Christ Who is the one Mediator of God and men, and gave Himself a ransom for all.

Therefore are you without excuse. And you are lost and must be condemned for ever, above all your sins for this crowning sin that you reject Christ Who died for you, losing the ransom so precious to God and efficacious for man. O bethink yourself: believe the words of Him Who cannot lie, and in love uttered this warning that you might hear and live. For both gates are clearly set before you, and both ways, one unto life and the other unto perdition. Many are they that enter through the wide gate and tread the broad way. O beware; for I too was once your fellow-sinner, as infatuated as any other. But the Shepherd's voice reached my ear, my soul. May it pierce yours, that you may turn off from the broad way, as from a serpent, yea the old Serpent the Devil, and enter the narrow gate of Christ, the straitened way that leads off unto life. Few are they that find it. May you know this happiness now and evermore in the Saviour.

5 Fruits

Matt. 7: 15-20.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 196-198. Gospel No. 12-5.)

The disciple is here cautioned. It is not only against trusting himself, that he may be dependent on his Father, and earnest in prayer that looks for an answer of grace. He has to pass through a scene haunted by the subtle emissaries of the unseen enemy; and the greater their pretension, the more are they to be shunned. The Lord would not have His own deceived and led astray.

"But beware of false prophets, which come unto you in sheep's clothing but within are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall them recognise. Do they gather from thorns a grape bunch or from thistles figs? So every good tree produceth good fruits, but the worthless tree produceth bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a worthless tree produce good fruits. Every tree that produceth not good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. Therefore at least by their fruits ye shall recognise them well

Every reader of the O.T. may learn the destructive part by the false prophets who followed like a dark shadow the holy men whom the Holy Spirit inspired, and took up popular cries to oppose the warnings of God as evil became more rampant. There is no less danger now, as Peter particularly insists under the gospel; not to say that there is so much the more when good men pretend not to inspiration and are no longer invested with miraculous vouchers, but press only the word in the Spirit. And so it will be again for the godly remnant in the last days when, the heavenly ones being caught up, it becomes a question of that land and people. But the Lord's warning is of living value now also, as we hear in the worst and deceptive form (1 John 2: 18-23; 1 John 4: 1-6; 2 John 7-11). What believer does not know of the boldest antagonism to the truth? What Christian has not tasted bitter grief in seeing saints of God deluded by the sheerest clap-trap? Yea, even conniving, for alleged peace, unity, or testimony, at the denial of Christ's Person?

They who love Christ do well to beware of false prophets, who are such as come unto them in the garb of sheep, but within are ravening wolves. They may cultivate sanctimoniousness and pretend to

devotion, but are under the dominion of a mightier foe than themselves, and filled with the keenest zeal to deprive the Christian of a true Christ, of life eternal possessed, of present standing as God's righteousness in Christ, of association with Him in and for heavenly glory. Are not such truly ravening wolves? What remains, if the disciple lose all the treasure distinctive of Christianity?

"By their fruits ye shall recognise them." Do they exalt Him who humbled Himself? Do they confess His incomprehensible being, God and man in one Person? Do they proclaim His grace and truth? Do they follow Christ in absolute subjection to scripture? Do they own it, as the invaluable standard, and the sure communication, of God's mind by His Spirit? Is the believer established? Is the sinner won and delivered? Or are minds filled with ideas which but inflate the spirit, inspire self-complacency, and end in death? For these are practical effects which test what men teach, and which are legible enough to simple souls little versed in scriptural truth, and still less in human subtleties. And thus the Lord safeguards the sheep in various ways.

There is another class of false prophets who more openly contradict the Lord, count scripture obsolete, or deny that it was ever more than Hebrew sages moralising or romancing according to their genius. Hence they dare to say that the wide gate is all right, and the broad way safe; that the few are only sour, proud, and narrow, and that the many cannot but be welcome to the universal Father, Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, too good to be severe to His erring children. Here again for all who receive scripture as the expression of divine revelation and authority there is no lack of evidence for any one to recognise these false prophets from their fruits. For their love of the world, or indulgence of the flesh, is as plain as their apology for sin, slight of the Saviour, and ignorance of the true God.

Good fruits are produced by neither the religious misbeliever or the profane unbeliever. How could it be? Do people gather a bunch of grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Those who utter false oracles are trees which the Father never planted. It is the worthless tree producing bad fruits: whereas every good tree produces good fruits. Christ is the true vine; and they only who abide in Him are branches that bear good fruit.

O then, sinner, renounce yourself, and heed none who point to another than Christ. Were He not set forth openly, and did He not welcome you in perfect grace, your lot would be dismal indeed. But He Himself declares, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto myself" (John 12: 32). On earth He, the Messiah, was not sent save to the lost sheep of Israel, though he and she who by grace discerned a higher glory were blessed according to their faith. But lifted up on the cross He is seen as the Son of man come to seek and save the lost, whoever and whatever they might be. He is the attractive centre to draw all, however dark or distant, who own Him as Saviour and themselves as guilty and rained sinners. For on the cross He through death annulled him that has the might of death; on the cross He bore the judgment of sin and effected propitiation; on the cross His blood was shed that brings the defiled one perfectly cleansed nigh to God. O sinner, no longer hold out against a work thus provided and commended to you just as you are. Christ is the true God, and eternal life; and it is written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.

Made a true and living branch of the Vine, you will bear the good fruits of that only good tree. Be humbled, but not in despair, if through allowance of flesh you bear unworthily. For you have still the flesh in you, but no excuse to let it out. For if you are Christ's, you died to sin, not to sins merely, but to that source of lust and will, the flesh; and such is the virtue of His death to law too, that even if a Jew you ware made dead to that old husband and free to belong to Another, Who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God. The Holy Spirit directs your eye and heart to Christ; and He, as He

produces nothing but good fruit, never fails him that looks to Himself. He is the way, the only way of life and holiness; and if you live by faith, it is now yours to say, "not I, but Christ that liveth in me." Then and then only, can you produce good fruits; as surely as "every tree that produceth not good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire."

Be not deceived then. Look to Christ believingly; and all will be well with your soul now, and evermore. Therefore at least by their fruits ye shall know those that uphold the ways of the Lord, and those that pervert.

6 Bare Profession

Matt. 7: 21-23.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 213-214. Gospel No. 12-6.)

The Lord here delivers a most salutary warning, to which the new things of the kingdom gave occasion. For while the truth which came through Him is as precious as it is characteristic, it of necessity left the door open for mental activity and spurious profession in ways which could not under the law be addressed to Israel. "Now we know that, whatsoever things the law saith, it speaketh to those in (or, under) the law." The truth, Christ, on His coming into the world which knew Him not, casts His light upon every man, and places all that have it under deep and direct responsibility. But it is also capable of being abused widely and variously by a false pretension more or less willing, yet ever inexcusable.

This the Lord meets in these verses with emphatic clearness and solemnity.

"Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he that doeth the will of my Father that is in the heavens. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many works of power? And then will I avow to them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work lawlessness" (Matt. 7: 21-23).

The sense of entering into the kingdom of the heavens here is fixed to its glorious estate, not only by "in that day" in the following verse, but by the Lord's application of it in Matt. 8: 11, where its citizens sit in it with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It is the more important to note; because His rejection (which soon began to appear) brought in its "mysteries" as in Matt. 13, during which He sits on high upon the Father's throne, and the kingdom applies to the anomalous state, as in the field or world wherein He sowed wheat and the devil darnel to ruin as a whole. This is the present mixture of Christendom while the Lord is absent above, during which any one can say "Lord" in vain, and wheat and darnel grow together till the harvest time, and the glory come by judgment.

The essential thing is doing the will of His Father which Christ was revealing. As He said in John 5: 24, where life eternal was in question, "Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life eternal." These are the persons who, having done the good things as possessed of life now, rise for the resurrection of life (ver. 28). Equally peremptory is the Lord's word here. No profession without corresponding course of life can avail; nothing less or other than doing His heavenly Father's will. And who so competent to reveal as the Son, who left (as He tells us in John 16: 12, 13) many things, beyond hearing then, for the Holy Spirit to announce when He came?

It is clear that, as in the entire discourse, not a word is said about the new birth, still less redemption. The Lord is not here preaching to sinners how they were to be saved; He is teaching His

disciples how to walk before the Father that is in the heavens. How does He view that vague and multitudinous profession, which. is a burlesque of Christianity, though now so popular, on the one hand through histrionic ceremonies and gaudy shows and religious fables, and on the other through appeals to the intellect and to the imagination by oratory or. reasoning. There may be seeming devoutness and profuse earnestness; but without living faith in Christ, neither is God known nor is self judged. The Lord insists on true obedience.

O my fellow-sinner, how can you obey a far fuller standard than the law, as long "you are dead in your offences and sins? Are you not by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2)? For we are, saved (nobody else), as the apostle adds, by grace through faith. A rite is wholly unavailing. And faith is God's gift; it is not of works, as rash men pretend: else man could and would boast. Faithful is, the word, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1: 15). Oh then repent and believe the gospel.

How overwhelming is the Lord's warning! "Many shall say to Me in that day (and it is at hand), Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and by Thy name do many works of power? And I will say (not even you once knew Me, but) "I never knew you." Compare Heb. 6: 4-8. No gift of power is a sign of life eternal, not even the edifying gift of prophesying. A man might be an apostle of Christ, but not a child of God. "Ye must be born anew," begotten by the word of truth; which Judas never was. Outwardly near, he was really far off, not only a stranger in heart but an enemy. And so we read here of crowds not like Judas, deceived as well as deceivers, "Then will I avow to them, I never knew you."

So indeed it is and must be, where men enjoy the greatest outward privileges, and remain without faith working through love. But it is faith, not founded on evidence, nor on tradition, nor dependent on a dying priest or a dead ordinance or a self-asserting church, but given of God's grace that you may become God's son and Christ's bondman, though just as surely a member of His body. Thus only can you walk in obedience of the Father's word and will, till Christ comes or you depart to be with Him, waiting with Him as well as for Him till then.

And those who do not so believe, whatever their claims now, whatever their pretension to order, office, power or authority, must assuredly hear in that day the just and irrevocable sentence, "Depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness." May grace work and win now, giving an ear to hear the voice of Jesus to the saving of the soul, and delivering from the delusion that christening quickens souls, or exempts them from the condition of being lost and the need of being born anew.

7 Christ and the Law

Matt. 5: 18-20.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 229-230. Gospel No. 12-7.)

We have already seen how certainly and clearly laid down is Christ's position in ver. 17. He maintained the authority of the Old Testament. "Think ye not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfil." He came to make good God's mind therein. This He confirms in ver. 18. "For verily I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one point shall in no wise pass from the law till all things come to pass. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whosoever shall do and teach [them], he shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. For I say to you that, except your righteousness surpass [that] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no

wise enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (18-20).

That the Lord obeyed the law is beyond doubt. This is not the meaning of fulfilling. He gave the full scope of the law and the prophets; and He did yet more, for He revealed God in Himself both by words and ways, and disclosed those secrets of the kingdom which were absolutely hidden of old. For His rejection and departure to heaven would and did give it a quite new form; and beyond this the great mystery as to Christ and as to the church had to be made known, involving things still higher and deeper. But nothing in the new could weaken the authority of God in the old. "Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one point shall in no wise pass from the law till all things come to pass."

Christ should be glorified in heaven, and the Holy Spirit sent down to baptise the believing Jews and Greeks into one body, the body of Christ, the temple destroyed, the city trodden down by Gentiles, and the Jews scattered over the earth for their sin against Messiah. But even these woes on the chosen race fulfilled the law and the prophets, and in a special way Christ's word; yet more remains, and darkness still, before the law and the prophets are fulfilled in the salvation of Israel coming to and out of Zion. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God shall bless to the full His long unblest people, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. Oh haste the day! Assuredly Christ came not to make void but to fulfil.

But the Lord is here addressing His disciples who were still under the law. He is not yet even predicting His death on the cross and the redemption through His blood to which grace turned it in the justifying righteousness of God by faith to be revealed in the gospel. Indeed, as we have often noticed and might through the entire Sermon on the Mount, not one word says He here of this work of sovereign love. He first sets out the characteristics that are proper to the kingdom in verses 3-12; then position in 13, 14; and now the relation, like His own in their measure, to the revelation God had given to His ancient people, however unbelieving and unworthy as a whole. He does not foretell what their rejection of Himself must entail on the Jewish nation, or what God would then do for them or others who believe.

Hence in ver. 19 He still speaks to them as the godly remnant that heard His voice and clung to Him, born of God, but under law, and on this side of the cross and its blessed results to faith. Obedience first and last is insisted on. Here He begins with the law; but even in this chapter He goes on to what He is saying to *them*, which the ancients never heard. He brings in rich additions in Matt. 6 as declaring the Father's name from the close of Matt. 5, guards them from inward and outward snares in Matt. 7, and ends the discourse there with hearing and doing His words as the rock of wisdom and safety.

As undoing the word justly sunk one to be "least" in the kingdom, faithfulness to it raised to a great place therein. Evidently therefore the righteousness of such as entered must exceed and excel that of the Pharisee (ver. 20) who honoured tradition, the word of man, to the necessary disparagement of God's word.

It was the perfection of giving His disciples their food in due season. Many prophets and kings, some even inspired, desired to see the things which the disciples saw, and saw them not; and to hear the things which they were hearing, and heard them not. And greater things were at hand, even that most wondrous of all wonders, God's work in the cross and the resurrection and the heavenly glory of His Son. But if heaven and earth shall pass, as they are, and not the least tittle of the law and the prophets, how far above these to God's glory and man's blessing rise the words of the Lord Jesus!

And these are words of His which deeply concern my reader, who is not a disciple of His, but a slave of sin and Satan. If you are indeed His disciple, let me rejoice with you in the grace God has

shown you. If you are not, but only a guilty and wretched sinner, I beseech you to hear His words meant for you to heed before God that you may live for ever. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are, heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Doubt Him not: He is able, He is willing. "I came to call, not righteous men, but sinners:" why despair, or turn away? Even His enemies cried, "This man receiveth sinners." What does He Himself say, even when His hearers sought to kill Him, and when He sought those who had not a pulse of life toward God? "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 [out of which no unbeliever can emerge, nor yet believer if he entered], but passed out of death into life."

For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him may not perish, but have life eternal. What love in God Who hates the sins and pities the sinner! What infinite love, when you think, first of His Son, then of yourself! But O my fellow-sinner, what a doom must be yours according to His word if you disbelieve the Son, are unsubject to Him, and neglect so great salvation!

8 Anger

Matt. 5: 21, 22.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 244-246. Gospel No. 12-8.)

The Scribes and Pharisees were especially ritualist and external. This was letter, not spirit. Our Lord not only condemns a righteousness of mere outward acts, but insists on inward reality as indispensable for the kingdom of the heavens. He does not explain at this time how the requisite practical righteousness is possible and actually made good in sinful men. He had already let Nicodemus know of the necessity for a Jew no less than a Greek to be born anew, as well as to have redemption by His cross. Here to His disciples He expounds the absolute need of realising the varied spiritual qualities brought before them in order to enter the kingdom. As the Pharisees fatally narrowed the scope of scripture, the Lord gave its fulness as none but He could. The first of these references is to the law of murder. But the Lord goes immeasurably farther for the kingdom.

"Ye have heard that it was said to those of old, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be subject to the judgment. But I say to you, that everyone that is [rightly] angry with his brother shall be subject to the judgment; whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be subject to the council; and whosoever shall say, Fool, shall be subject to the hell of fire" (Matt. 5: 21, 22). The law and the prophets He had vindicated. All must come to pass. Yet the law made nothing perfect. He speaks Who is above the law and gave fulness to all on His own authority.

Thus is the commandment made exceeding broad and deep. The axe is laid to the root of the evil tree. All violent feelings are judged as in God's sight, and every evil word of malice and contempt shown to be of sinful and dangerous consequence. As He said later in the same Gospel (Matt. 12: 37), "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Here He warns, not so much of every light word, but of wrath, hatred, and contempt. The Judge of all the earth, Himself despised by man and abhorred by the nation, as was soon proved, could not fail to discern aright.

The danger He denounced is the burning sense of self, of the old man set on fire of hell. Circumstances might hinder its expression; but it stays in the heart it ruled, and makes itself at length felt in its malignity. He that formed the heart knows it, as He detects a feeling so contrary to His own nature, not only unbecoming in man, but wholly inconsistent with the peacemakers, the pure in heart, the merciful, as well as the poor in Spirit, the mourning, the meek, and those hungering and thirsting

after righteousness, the blessed ones that suit the kingdom of the heavens. How too could it agree with being persecuted for righteousness' sake? how with being reproached, and having all manner of evil said and done against one falsely for Christ's sake, yet, rejoicing and being exceeding glad to be thus defamed and ill-used for His name?

But we know that very recently (Mark 3: 1-6) the Holy and the True looked round with anger in the synagogue on those who watched with murderous hate, if He would heal a poor sufferer on the Sabbath. Instead of shrinking from the issue, He bade the man rise up into the midst. They (the high and the broad) were silent; but the fire of their anger burned to destroy Him, after He also bade the man stretch out his palsied hand, restored on the instant His holy anger was distressed at the hardening of their hearts who, in the vain confidence of tradition (ever spurious), were thus maddened against the active and blessed goodness of God as a reality among men here below.

Again, John the baptist said to the Sadducees coming to his baptism, Viper brood, who forewarned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce therefore fruit worthy of repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for father. These were scathing words; but if anger dictated a word, it was unselfish and holy. It was indignation at men who sought a religious form to cover their unbelief and wickedness. And He, whose sandal-thong John counted himself unworthy to untie, pronounced woe after woe on these Scribes and Pharisees, albeit standing highest in Jewish estimation. Blind guides He called them, fools too and hypocrites and serpents; how should they escape the judgment of hell? Was not the blessed Lord fully justified in His words, overwhelming as they were to the highest degree? It was not enmity to tell an evil-doer the truth, that he might repent. Flesh hates fidelity.

If it be objected that so the Lord was entitled righteously to denounce, but no one else may, what are we to learn from one of like passions with ourselves? He on just occasion could say in the Spirit, to an erring saint at Corinth with questions about the resurrection, Fool! as he said before, Wake up righteously, and sin not; for some are ignorant of God: I speak to your shame. So in the next chapter he declares that if anyone love not the Lord, let him be Anathema Maran-atha (accursed at the Lord's coming), 1 Cor. 15, 16. The same apostle tells the saints (Eph. 4: 26), Be angry and sin not. If one truly follow the Lord and the apostle, anger then is a duty, not a sin; yet one surely has to watch and pray withal.

The source, motive, and aim decide. If of God and for Him by the Spirit, anger has His sanction; if for self, it is evil that exposes to judgment: and so the Lord denounces on its various degrees expressed in a form familiar to Jews.

O my fellow-sinner, whose words have been habitually sinful, violent and ungodly, how can you, as you are, enter the kingdom? And if you cannot, what must be your end without end? The Judge tells you plainly. But He is now the Saviour, the only perfect Saviour. Flee, flee for refuge, for pardon, and a new nature, to Him Who alone can give all you need. The resource of God's grace is Christ. And if we believe on Him, His love constrains us to live, not to self, but to Him Who for our sakes died and rose again. Then only do we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

9 Reconciliation

Brotherly Reconciliation.

Matt. 5: 23-26.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 261-262. Gospel No. 12-9.)

The Lord was not content, with authority peculiarly and emphatically His own, to lay down the hateful evil of anger in heart and word, even if not in violent deed. He proceeds to carry out the revealed mind of God for the kingdom by requiring reconciliation if any had stumbled one's brother. Throughout, disciples are in view, not mankind in general. Sin in disciples is exceeding sinful: good is peremptory (surely not evil) for the kingdom of the heavens.

"If therefore thou be offering thy gift at the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Make friends (or, be of good-will) 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 official, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say to thee, Thou shalt in no wise come out thence till thou have paid the last farthing" (Matt. 5: 23-26).

It is no less evident that Jewish disciples as yet under the law are those addressed. This is as plain in vers. 20, 21 as in those we are now considering. In fact it is the rule in this Gospel as a whole and in the others; and it must be so, till in the death of Christ the middle wall of partition was broken down, and thus the way was opened to reconcile both Jew and Gentile that believed in one body to God, the enmity being slain. The discourse of our Lord anticipates no such unity, nor even the call of the Gentiles, in any one clause. But it is a profound mistake that this indisputable fact takes away the profit of a single word from the Christian, though we stand now in a position of grace which could not be then. There is the richest instruction morally for every one who honours Him who spake as never man spake; a spiritual estimate of unequalled depth for those who know redemption and have the indwelling Spirit to enter in far more fully than those who heard His words of divine truth at the time He uttered them.

Thus the Lord enjoins the disciple who was bringing his gift to the altar, if he remembered that his brother had anything against him, to stop short of his devoted purpose as to God Himself, and be reconciled to his brother, before returning to offer his gift. What tenderness of conscience was looked for, brotherly affection, lowliness of mind, readiness to own wrong, and desire to win an offended brother! It was the very reverse of anger, contempt, or hatred, which He had just treated, as His servant in measure re-echoed at a much later day (1 John 3: 11-15). And that reverse was the Jews' case. For absorbed in bringing their offering to the altar, they were blind to their wrong against Him who deigned to be their brother, with far more than brother's love, born for adversity as they knew not. But they refused to be reconciled, and persisted in their offering, however offensive to God. It was presumptuous sin, and high-handed self-will under cloak of religion.

What follows points to a still more solemn consideration. Who that weighs scripture can doubt that the Lord in vers. 25, 26 refers to the position in which the Jew then stood with God? This was a far deeper consideration than any other brother aggrieved: their Lord became their brother. The awful truth is that He who loved Israel and would die for them, Jehovah-Messiah, was made their adversary by their perverse disobedience and blind unbelief; and His presence, which had been their salvation and best blessing if received, must bring on the inevitable crisis by their utter rejection and hatred of Him. The Lord at this point avails Himself of the occasion in His infinite grace to urge their agreeing, or making friends, with their adversary quickly, whilst in the way with him. How His heart yearned over them, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings! But they would not. Their deadliest aversion was to their loving Messiah.

Hence the case was just about to come before the Judge, and the Judge would deliver to the official

the convicted one, and he must be cast into prison till the last farthing be paid. It is no question here of eternal judgment, but of divine government morally on the earth; but all is plainly true of His people found guilty and consigned to suffer long. In that prison still lies the guilty debtor, till his heart turns to the One he despised. Then the word shall go forth, Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her, that her time of sorrow (or, suffering) is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins (Isa. 40: 1, 2). Who is a God like unto Thee, that forgiveth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? (Micah 7: 18.) Is not this the true unforced bearing of our Lord's words? One may apply it, to Christian use or unchristian warning. But it is an evil to twist scripture or to complain of those who bow to its full force. Such ignorance has led men into the fable of purgatory.

But let me appeal to you, my reader, who may excuse yourself because you do not profess to be a disciple. How will this avail when you stand before the great white throne? By your own plea to escape responsibility you incur certain and everlasting perdition. You know that your works are evil, and that dying as you live, you are utterly unfit to be in heaven with the Holy One of God. He whom you refuse as Saviour now will then be your Judge. You turn away from the Lord, you neglect so great salvation; your name is not in the book of life ; your works are selfish, vain, proud, wilful; addicted to lustful passion, rebellious against God, you serve Satan, and therefore must your portion be with the enemy of God and of His Son, as you have been here and are now.

O be warned in time. For the end of all things is at hand, even if you live; and your life at best is but a vapour. You know not what a day may bring forth. God was in Christ reconciling, not only embittered, or self-righteous Jews, but a world to Himself, not imputing their offences to them. But all was vain for either: they hated both the Son and the Father. A great king, a mighty conqueror, would have been to their taste. How would that have blotted out their sins, or given them a nature to serve God on earth and enjoy Him in heaven? In divine wisdom and grace their hatred was allowed to culminate in His cross; and thereby sin was judged, themselves who believe cleansed from their iniquities, and made God's righteousness in Christ. O harden not yourself for hell-fire. God as it were beseeching by us, we pray for Christ, on His behalf who died for you: he reconciled to God. The work is done, according to His will, to save you for ever. Repent and believe the gospel. What could be done to compare with that which God has done?

10 Impurity

Matt. 5: 27-30.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 276-277. Gospel No. 12-10.)

Throughout it is not mere acts the Lord demands, but state; the spiritual condition suitable for the kingdom of the heavens. As in the verses immediately preceding the Lord insists on a spirit of lowly grace, going immeasurably beyond Thou shalt not kill, so now on a purity as far beyond the non-commission of adultery.

It is plain also that here, as everywhere in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, it is not the grace which saves the lost sinner who repents and believes the gospel. The state of soul that befits entrance into the kingdom of the heavens exclusively occupies the Lord. He is teaching the disciples what suited the Father's name which He made known to them. All that He laid down therefore manifestly presupposes that one is born of God, as the essential requisite for His kingdom, not acts merely if they

could be good, but renewal of heart. Christ Himself was the blessed pattern of perfection.

"Ye heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit, adultery; but I say unto you that every one that looketh at a woman to lust after her committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye stumbleth (or, ensnareth) thee, pluck out and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand stumbleth thee, cut off and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee, that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell."

Violence and corruption are the sad characteristics of man's fallen estate. We see them marked in the antediluvian world, at least as the general signs of a ruined state, whatever the specific evil which aroused divine indignation and unsparing judgment. Throughout man's history as traced in the Bible, and particularly in the favoured circle of Israel under the law, they are ever before us. Christ came, and grace and truth through Him, and redemption through His blood, everlasting redemption, to say nothing now of heavenly counsels made good in His person and place, and communications to the Christian and to the church. But man is essentially unchanged, and even avails himself of grace to become the worse. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil." "But when thy judgments are in the earth," says the prophet, "the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness," Showing favour to the wicked, who believe not, emboldens them to persevere. And as the Jew was no exception who dealt wrongfully in the land of uprightness and would not behold the majesty of Jehovah, so will the Gentile reject the gospel to his perdition, and be cut off irretrievably. The time also hastens.

But as of old, so now are the faithful men, of whom the world is not worthy, who lived and suffered as seeing Him who is invisible. And the Lord did not lower the standard but raised it, clearing it of letter and of all accretions or diminutions. He has the godly remnant in view, still Jewish as He spoke, who not only entered the kingdom, but had higher relations intimated as His rejection set in, till His session at God's right hand and mission of the Spirit gave all necessary to reveal and make good in the saints what had been ever hidden heretofore.

As violence then was judged and excluded in any shape for the disciples, so was impurity. The avoidance of the extreme act might satisfy a Pharisee or Scribe; but the Lord could not dispense with anything short of truth in the inward parts. To look at a woman lustfully was to commit adultery with her already in his heart; and it is not the outside only that God regards but the heart above all. It is only a new nature that delights in holiness; and he who has it by grace answers to the will of God his Father; and abhors himself if he slip even into a wrong look, as unworthy of his calling and hateful to Him who loves him.

But the Lord follows up His stringent condemnation by the call to deal promptly and unreservedly with anything that acted as an incentive. Therefore He specifies that which is part of ourselves, and when, rightly used of the greatest value. Not even the right eye, or the right foot, can be allowed in presence of His displeasure which the saint fears, because he is a believer and God's child; as the Lord said elsewhere, "Be not afraid of those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will tell you whom ye shall fear. Fear him who, after he hath killed the body, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say to you, Fear him." It is not the highest motive, but it is an imperative and most solemn and urgent appeal.

Therefore says He now, "And if thy right eye stumbleth thee, pluck out and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand stumbleth thee, cut, off and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee, that one of thy members perish,

and not thy whole body be cast into hell." The right eye and the right hand present forcibly the mortifying of our members that are on the earth, to hinder sin against God. At, all cost must the believer deny self; as we find elsewhere he must hate father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, yea and his own life also, or he cannot be Christ's disciple.

O my fellow-sinner, you know that this is wholly beyond you. You do not, will not, make any such sacrifices. Nothing but Christ, the new life, can so feel and act; and you have only your depraved life of sin and self. Are you then to despair? Yes, despair of yourself. You are truly lost, as the Lord says. But He came to seek and to save the lost. Tell God of your guilt and ruin, but plead the name of Jesus whom He has sent. He is a present and everlasting Saviour. Doubt not, but believe what God declares of His Son. Life in Him answers to the appeal of Jesus, when you rest on His redemption; and the Holy Spirit will strengthen you accordingly.

11 Purity in Divorce

Matt. 5: 31, 32.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 294-296. Gospel No. 12-11.)

In connection with the light of heaven on the lusts of the heart, the Lord adds His word on the permission of divorce in Deut. 24. It is here the woman protected against hard-hearted man. Positive sin in violation of the marriage tie alone calls for divorce. Men abused the licence beyond measure, as if the permission were a precept; and any vexation sufficed. But Jehovah hates putting away, as the last prophet testified to the Jews in their evil day.

In Matt. 19 the question distinctly proposed to Him by the Pharisees, Is it lawful to put away one's wife for every cause? And He answered and said, Have ye not read that He that made from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God joined together, let not man put asunder. They say to Him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce and to put away? He saith to them, Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it hath not been thus. But I say to you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and he that marrieth one put away committeth adultery. His disciples say to Him, If the case of man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. And He said to them, All cannot receive this word, but those to whom it hath been given.

Thus was the mind of God made clear. The indulgence of lust is incompatible with entering the kingdom of the heavens. The law forbade the act of adultery; the Lord condemns even the looking licentiously as adultery committed already in the heart. He insisted therefore on the most unsparing decision with all that gave occasion. Was it not better to pluck out the right eye or cut off the right hand, rather than the whole body be cast into hell? Here (as in all the chapters of the first Gospel before Matthew 13 where He begins as the Sower), it is not seeking sinners in sovereign grace, but saints, as He enjoins on the twelve in chap. 10. "Into whatsoever city or village ye enter, inquire who in it is worthy" (ver. 11). So the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) describes what spiritual characters suit the kingdom, as the end (Matt. 7) declares that none shall enter but he that does the will of His Father that is in the heavens. Not even prophesying or miraculous powers, were it casting out demons through the Lord's name, could be a passport to the workers of lawlessness. Practical obedience of His words alone should stand. The rock here is spiritual reality. His word was

incomparably more withering to self-righteousness than the law of Moses.

There is power of God given exceptionally to be above marriage, and live only to Christ here below. But, to far the most, marriage is God's order for man on earth. And the monkish rule with high pretension leads into horrible evasion, hypocrisy, and corruption even contrary to nature and abominable. God's mind is clear from the first; adultery alone justifies divorce.

Hence the necessity would be felt urgently and absolutely of receiving a new nature and an everlasting redemption in the Saviour. No interpretation of our Lord's words here or elsewhere is more radically false than that He puts believers under the law as their rule of life. He is really condemning unbelievers and hypocrites far more stringently than the law did, and those sayings of the elders which took advantage of a legal permission for carnal indulgence and unfairness to a wife who through any cause became less attractive to her selfish husband. Such souls were inadmissible to the kingdom. Only the godly remnant are here contemplated, who abhor corruption as they do violence. The presence of Christ, not of the law given by Moses, was bile suited moment for defining the character and conduct proper to the new thing He would set up. He was the standard of what pleased God, and must mark those who are His. "The law made nothing perfect" was a hard lesson for Jews; it seems quite as hard for those who inherit the traditions of fallen Christendom, and not less for Protestants than Papists,

To be content with being nobody in the world, and despised by its religion, is impossible to human nature; to be mourners as Christ was, feeling for God's will and majesty where lawlessness pervades; to be meek now, waiting for the glorious inheritance in God's time, instead of clamorous for our rights; to hunger and thirst after (not ease or wealth, or power or honour, but) righteousness, cannot be without partaking of a divine nature. Harder still was the actively gracious spirit of mercifulness, purity in heart, and peace-making according to God, with the persecutions which such righteousness entails, and especially such maintenance of Christ's name as effaces ours.

Our Lord accordingly singles out of the Decalogue the two great prohibitions of murder on the one hand and of adultery on the other. Assuredly He came not to make void the law or the prophets, but to give their fulness. He not only went farther than either, but declared that a righteousness surpassing that of the Scribes and Pharisees was indispensable for entering the kingdom of the heavens. He most pointedly sets His word with divine authority, so as to contrast what He laid down far beyond the claims of the law. In the case before us, as looking lustfully convicts of adultery before God, so whosoever put away his wife, save for cause of fornication, made her commit adultery, as well as him who married her. Thus He established a moral basis, not for a nation of mixed character, but fit for God's family and kingdom, which judged the heart's evil and allowed no concession to hard-heartedness. And what can be plainer than on this later occasion (Matt. 19) His going up to the beginning, long before the law, to God's instituted order and word in Gen. 2? There again His own word is full and final authority, for the Messiah was the Jehovah God of Israel. Whatever had been allowed by Moses, He is Mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. It is God speaking in Him who is Son: But I say to you."

Now, I appeal to your conscience, my reader. Can you face the light of God, which our Lord is, on these evils of man's fallen nature? Are you not utterly convicted by every saying of His, who is the Judge of living and dead? And if such be the truth, O spread it out, and yourself as verily guilty before God. Presume no more to stand on your own foundation. You are lost: own it truly and humbly and in earnest. The Lord Jesus is not Judge only; He is the real and the only and the present Saviour of the lost. But you must be in the truth of your guilt in God's sight, if He is to act toward you in the truth of His salvation. That is repentance toward God; this is faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is for faith the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all, from every, sin. There is also life in Him, the Son, for every believer in Him. The one is as indispensable as the other. That life is the spring of the new nature which produces every good fruit and detests every evil work, word, and feeling; and now that one rests on His work of redemption, the Holy Ghost is given as divine power to strengthen the new man and mortify the old. It is true, that dependence on Christ, abiding in Him, is needed all the way through, and His words to abide in one, and prayer suitably and with confidence in divine love. But this is just practical Christianity so far; and we are sanctified by the Spirit, not to independence which is sin, but to obedience, the same blessed filial obedience as Christ's, our blessed Lord.

12 Swear not at all

Matt. 5: 33-37.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 308-309. Gospel No. 12-12.)

Here again the teaching of our Lord far transcends what was said of old. His presence brought in the light of God, and it was addressed to a new and divine nature in those who believe. It dealt with the root of every question, not merely with the fruit or overt acts.

"Again ye heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not swear falsely, but shalt render to the Lord thine oaths. But I say to you, Swear not at all; neither by (in) the heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his feet's footstool; nor by (toward) Jerusalem, for it is the great King's city. Nor shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your word be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; but what exceedeth these is of evil (or, the evil one)."

Thus the Lord goes far beyond perjury or breaking a vow. He prohibits swearing altogether in the intercourse of daily life. Our word therein is to be, Yea, yea, or Nay, nay. That which is more than these has no sanction from God, and is therefore of evil, or the evil one, the enemy of God and man. All such asseveration as the Lord illustrates from the facts of Jewish habit. arose from the constant experience of men in deceiving or evading. They therefore resorted to such means of insuring the truth. But these efforts defeated themselves; for we know from a reliable Jewish contemporary of the N.T. inspired writers that oaths by earth, heaven, sun, stars, and the entire universe, were not counted binding. Only those obliged the conscience which were by God's name direct and express; nay others might be transgressed. As the Lord supposed in those He addresses poverty of spirit and purity of heart, He proscribed absolutely all such swearing as offensive to God and incompatible with the place of His sons.

Nor is it only Jews then, but professing Christians now, that show themselves as indifferent to the Lord's authority as if He had never thus solemnly uttered His mind. Among Protestants there is some little care to avoid profanity by adopting light and foolish exclamations, or by repeating heathen terms derived from their Greek or Latin reading, forgetting that if the idols are nothing, the demons behind them are real and evil. Romanists are much less scrupulous. It is sad to think how perverts go farther in excuse for their blasphemous phrases than those born and bred in their vain superstitions.

Take the following proof from the late Cardinal Newman's "Lectures on certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Submitting to the Catholic Church": "Listen to their conversation; listen to the conversation of any multitude, or any private party; what strange oaths mingle with it! God's heart, and God's eyes, and God's wounds, and God's blood: you cry out, 'How profane!' Doubtless; but do you not see that the special profaneness above Protestant oaths lies, not in the words but simply in the speaker, and is the necessary result of that insight into the invisible world which you have not? You use the

vague words, 'Providence,' or 'the Deity,' or 'good luck,' or 'nature'; where we, whether now or of old, realise the Creator in His living works, instruments, and personal manifestations, and speak of the 'Sacred Heart,' or 'the Mother of Mercies,' or 'our Lady of Walsingham,' or 'St. George for Merry England,' or 'loving St. Francis,' or 'dear St. Philip.' Your people would be as varied and fertile in their adjurations and invocations as a Catholic populace, if they believed as we" (Ninth Lecture, p. 232).

It is grace alone which delivers from Popery and even Protestantism, and makes it a divine joy to be a Christian, neither more nor less. Irreverence of every sort, worldly or superstitious, becomes intolerably evil in one's eyes; and it is the first of duties for the believer to hear these words of Christ and reduce them to practice. But is it not an awful instance of Satan's blinding power, that while none but the vilest of Protestants would think of excusing his own ungodly badinage, a grave clergyman in his new born (or at least early open) apology for the shameless fooling of Papists should plead so barefacedly, not only for such ebullitions in word, but for turning the Last Judgment into a play of fireworks, and argue for it that "they are making one continuous and intense act of faith" (p. 237)

But we must carefully remember, that our Lord in no way forbids an oath before the magistrate or judge. This is not of evil; but of good, being of divine authority. For men swear by a greater, and the oath is a term to all dispute as making matters sure. To refuse it is to deny God's authority in any who represent Him in earthly things, and hence called by His name and translated "judges," as in Ex. 21: 6, Ex. 22: 8, 9, 28. See also Ps. 82: 1, 6. The principle is asserted in Lev. 5: 1, to which the Lord, far from setting aside on the mount, bowed when adjured by the high priest (Matt. 26: 63, 64), though silent before.

In like manner James 5: 12 with marked earnestness forbids swearing either by heaven or by earth. These were not judicial adjuration, which does not fall under people's swearing. It was rather being sworn in God's name. Nor did our Lord any more than His servant prohibit such appeals to God as in Rom. 1: 9, 1 Cor. 15: 31, 2 Cor. 1: 23, Gal. 1: 20, or the like. The scruple of Friends or Separatists has no foundation in scripture.

But how and where do you stand, my reader? Have you owned yourself a lost sinner, and the Lord Jesus the only, the willing, and the perfect Saviour? Believe in Him, and thou shalt be saved. So said Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer, suddenly arrested, and not to him only, but also to his house. And the same night he was baptised, and all his straightway. Why not you too? The same Lord is open to you. May you exult as he did, having believed with all his house in God, the God of all grace.