

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

(1802-1878)

MARCH 1

Matthew 12:9-13. *Christ heals the man with the withered hand.*

It was upon the way to the *synagogue* that the disciples had plucked the ears of corn; for our Savior did honor to the ordinances of public worship by attending them himself. He *taught* at the synagogue, he sat among the readers, and expounded. His enemies were present; for they observed the *forms* of religion, though they knew not its *power*.

Jesus noticed among the congregation a man with a withered hand. He would not be restrained by the malice of his enemies from displaying his mercy. The Pharisees observed what he was going to do, and asked him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day. Jesus answered their question by another; for, in Mark's gospel, we find that He replied, "Is it lawful to do *good* on the Sabbath, or to do *evil*? To *save* life or to *kill*?" Thus he showed that he read the wicked hearts of his enemies, and perceived their design of killing him. It was impossible for them to resist this appeal to their consciences; they held their peace, as all the wicked shall do at the judgment-seat of Christ. "The mouths of those who speak lies shall be stopped;" (Ps. 63:11.) "The wicked shall be silent in darkness." (1 Sam. 2:9.) Jesus regarded this poor man as a sheep fallen into a pit of affliction. He had looked upon all mankind as such a sheep, and had come down to redeem their precious souls from death. With what compassion he viewed his poor sheep, "plunged in a gulf of dark despair," whence it never could extricate itself?

Mark describes our Savior's *feelings* towards his enemies on this occasion. "He looked round about him with anger, being *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts." Well might it grieve him to behold sinners endeavoring to hinder the healing of a poor sufferer, only because the Savior's glory would shine forth the more brightly on that account. What a dreadful instance of hardness of heart! But are there not some in these days who commit similar sins, by opposing the preaching of the Gospel, which can alone restore a withered *soul*? Does not Jesus view such people *now* with anger and with grief?

The *manner* in which he healed the poor man is very remarkable. He *could* have cured him by a *word*; but he desired him to stretch forth his hand. Was not this a strange command? It was the man's disease, that he could not stretch forth his hand. The man might have replied, "I have often endeavored to stretch forth my hand, and have not been able. Why should I try again?" But he made no such unbelieving answer; he confided in the power of Jesus, and his attempt was successful.

The Lord in his Gospel commands us to do things that seem to be *impossible*. He says, "Repent and believe." We are sinners, and *cannot* repent and believe, except by a miracle of grace. Our hearts are hard—how can they *repent* and feel *grieved* because we have sinned against God? Our minds are *blind*, how can we *believe* and see the glorious salvation of Christ? Let us beware of saying, "We cannot repent and believe—we have often tried, and we have not been able." There is a dreadful history of one who reasoned thus. It was Dr. Priestly. In his youth he discovered that he was not born again—at first he was greatly distressed at finding he *could not* repent and believe; but instead of looking to the power of Christ to enable him, he listened to the devil, who suggested that there was no such thing as repentance, faith, or regeneration. He believed the lie; he preached it; and how did he *die*? Comforting himself with the thought that there was no eternal punishment—another lie suggested by Satan. He said to a friend, "Reach down that *book*—(he did not mean the Bible—he did not desire to hear its precious promises)—that book has greatly consoled me; it has convinced me that we shall *all* come to heaven *at last*, whatever sufferings we may endure first." Thus he died, expecting to be cast into hell for a *time*, and then to be translated to heaven. But who could bear the thoughts of passing *one day* in the lake of fire, or even *one hour*! Let us beware of the *first* unbelieving thought, lest it should increase to more ungodliness. Jesus commands, "Stretch forth your hand—Repent—believe." If we have not repented or believed, let us make the effort now, confiding in his strength who gave the command.

March 2

Matthew 12:14-21. *Isaiah's description of the gentle and compassionate Savior.*

Though Jesus had *silenced* his enemies in the synagogue, he had not overcome the enmity of their hearts. Though they could not *answer* him, they could *hate* him. So great was their hatred, that when they left the synagogue, "they held a council against him how they might kill him." Without the grace of God, public worship cannot benefit the soul. From the church where the Savior has been present to bless many of the congregation, we may retire only "to do evil with both hands, earnestly."

Jesus retreated from his enemies to do good in another scene. He permits his followers to flee from persecution; but he enjoins them, wherever they go, still to seek to serve God.

Great multitudes followed Him into his retreat by the side of the lake, desiring to be healed of their diseases. Many people have wondered *why* he desired those whom he healed not to make him known. It appears that one reason was, that he did not wish, by the report of His miracles, to increase the rage of his enemies, and thus to provoke them to acts of violence before his work was done, and his hour was come. Another reason was, that he did not desire to add to the throng who followed him, and who pressed upon him to a painful degree. Already the concourse was so immense, that he was obliged to escape from the crowd into a ship. People flocked from the most distant parts of the land, and even from heathen cities. We find it recorded in Mark 3:8, that they came from Idumea, or Edom, and from Tyre and Sidon, the habitations of idolatrous nations. Jesus did not desire the praise of multitudes; it gave him no pleasure to hear their shouts as he passed; he delighted in the petitions of the poor trembling sinner, and in the love of those whose sins he had forgiven. Was not his gentle, retiring, compassionate character truly described by the prophet Isaiah in the passage beginning, "Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen!"

Now in this prophecy there are several deeply interesting points. A glimpse is here afforded of the everlasting covenant, that covenant which the Father made with the Son respecting our salvation. It was made before the world began; for God foresaw our ruin, and knew that none but his only-begotten Son could save us; therefore he appointed his Son to do this mighty work. The Son consented, and replied, "Lo, I come—I delight to do your will, O God; yes, your law is within my heart," (Ps. 40.) And lo, he *came*. Thus Christ became the *servant* of God his Father. He finished the work that his Father had given him to do, and then ascended to sit at his right hand as our Intercessor. He now pleads the merits of his service, and asks for his reward, the salvation of sinners. His Father has promised that he shall prevail. That is the meaning of the words, (v. 20,) "He shall send forth judgment unto *victory*." Yes—all the ends of the world shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord, (Ps. 22.) That glorious day has not yet arrived. Meanwhile, let us trust in him.

See what a gentle Savior he is. "He will not break the *bruised* reed," or the broken heart. "He will not quench the smoking flax." The first desires of a soul after Christ may be compared to the smoke of flax, after it has received a spark, and before it is kindled into a flame. Will he quench these feeble desires? No—he will fan them into a flame. How can we refuse to trust in so compassionate a Savior! Ought we not to come to him with confidence, knowing that what he was on *earth*, he *is* now in *heaven*!

March 3

Luke 6:12-16. Christ chooses his twelve apostles.

We must remember, that though Jesus was God, yet that he was clothed in a body like our own, and was subject to all our feelings of fatigue. What ardor of love must have filled his bosom to have driven sleep from his eyelids, and to have sustained him in prayer for a *whole* night! How long do *we* pass in prayer? Half an hour? perhaps not five minutes morning and evening; perhaps the greater part even of that time our thoughts are wandering to the ends of the earth. Or do we *never* pray in spirit, with hearty desires after God? Do we feel our prayers a burdensome task; and do we *never* pour out our souls, as a child pours out his feelings into his father's bosom? If this be the case, how dreadful is our condition!

But even if we *do* know what it is to pray to God, yet we must feel that we do not pray as much, or as earnestly as we ought.

What blessings we should receive if we prayed to God more fervently, and entreated him and implored him to fulfill his promises! Why are we so apt to make excuses, and to think that we are too busy, or too much fatigued to pray! Is it because we do not believe that God hears us? or is it because we think that He will give us blessings without our asking for them? Let us beware lest we provoke God, by our negligence, to withdraw the blessings he has already bestowed.

We may conclude what was the subject of our Savior's prayer that night, when we observe what was his employment the next morning. Then he chose twelve from among his disciples to be *apostles*. Was he not praying in the night for them, and for the success of their ministry? What blessings have been poured down upon thousands in answer to those midnight prayers!

But even *we*, unworthy as we are, might assist our Redeemer's cause by joining in his petitions; for he once said, "The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few; *pray* therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

Yes, even *we* may entreat God to choose holy men, and to make them his ministers. Human creatures may build churches, but they cannot place in them holy ministers, unless God prepare men for the ministry. And what is a church without a man of God in it! False teachers ruin men's souls; *they* are not the ministers of Christ. Let us pray that God may send us pastors after his own heart to feed us with good knowledge, and understanding, and that he may send his shepherds forth to the ends of the earth to bring in his lost sheep into his fold.

These twelve apostles were not to become ministers *immediately*. If you refer to Mark 3:14, you will find that Jesus ordained them that they should *first* be with him, and *then* go forth and preach. All who teach others must be *with* Jesus to be

taught by him.

Who were the men whom Jesus chose to be his apostles or messengers? (for apostle means "person sent forth.")

Some were fishermen; Matthew was a tax-collector; and probably none were great in this world.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were called Boanerges, or sons of thunder; and it is supposed that they afterwards preached with great power, for though John is famous for writing about love, he wrote *terrible* warnings to sinners, and no doubt uttered them also, even as Jesus his gentle master did.

The last mentioned is Judas Iscariot, or the man of Carioth, the traitor! And why did Jesus choose such a man, when from the beginning he knew he would betray him, and once said, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" *Why* then did he choose him? No doubt one reason was to fulfill the prophecy in Ps. 41—"My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Might he not also have intended to teach us a solemn lesson by the example of Judas? It is possible to be with Jesus, to hear him night and day; it is possible to *appear* religious and to preach holy doctrines, and yet to perish everlastingly. There are too many instances of people who have *appeared* to have been born of God, who have died in sin.

Baxter relates that in his youthful days he had a friend who *seemed* more earnest than himself, who prayed with him and exhorted him, and who finally fell away, and made shipwreck of his faith. Can we hear of such instances without lifting up our hearts to God to keep us from falling?

March 4

Luke 6:17-19. A multitude of people healed by touching Christ.

We have just read how Jesus spent a whole night in prayer, and in the morning chose his twelve apostles. After choosing them he came down from the mountain, and found a vast multitude collected together in a plain beneath.

What a scene of *suffering* must have been witnessed upon this occasion, and what a scene of *joy* must have succeeded when the tongue of the mute sang, and the lame man leaped as the deer, when mothers again beheld their drooping infants restored to all the freshness of health, when fathers rejoiced over children once tormented with devils, suddenly become gentle, reasonable, and happy? Yet these changes are but faint emblems of the glorious works which are now wrought where the gospel is preached in power—for virtue (that is, a *divine power*) still goes out of Jesus, and where his name is proclaimed, tongues which

were mute in his praise are loosed; feet that could not walk in his ways are strengthened; parents behold their wandering children returning to their forsaken God; and even angels in heaven survey the scene and look forward with joy to the time when redeemed sinners shall be their companions in heaven. O blessed gospel, which can effect such wonders! May it be preached all over the world, and rescue every sinner from the power of Satan!

There were probably some *spiritual* cures wrought by Jesus on that plain; for the multitude came not only to be healed, but also to hear him. This seemed a favorable opportunity for preaching a public discourse. This sermon is recorded by Luke. It is doubtful whether that recorded by Matthew is the same as this, or whether it was delivered on a different occasion. But the two sermons are so much alike, that it will be best to select *one* only, and as Matthew gives the *fullest* account, we will consider the sermon recorded in his gospel.

Never could a congregation have had such motives to listen to a preacher as the audience that surrounded our Lord at this time. With what feelings of grateful love the newly-restored sufferers must have regarded their compassionate Savior! And with what emotions of reverence and awe those who had witnessed the miracles must have gazed upon the Almighty Lord!

But much as we must admire the *power* displayed in his miracles, we must be chiefly touched by that *love* which induced him to welcome and relieve the suffering throng. The selfish heart of a fallen man would soon be wearied and disgusted with such a crowd of miserable objects. But the Son of God shrunk not from the leper's touch, nor the maniac's shriek.

The love of Jesus flowed out to meet the misery of man. It is thus even now. His love is still shown in listening to the cries of the most degraded outcasts. Those whom proud men would trample under foot, need only cry to the condescending Savior, and they shall be heard, received, and welcomed. The beggar in his hovel is visited, even the felon in his cell, when, in the hour of trouble, he calls upon the name of Jesus. Could we track the steps of the Savior through the world, we would find that while he passed by many a stately mansion and many a grand palace, he often cheered by his presence the hut of the African slave, and softened by his love the hard bed of the dying pauper. How blessed are they who tread in the steps of the Savior, and who delight more in relieving the sufferer than in shining in elegant society, and partaking of splendid entertainments!

Everyone has heard of Howard, the prisoner's friend; and of Wilberforce, the negro's friend; and of Ashley, the friend of the factory child—but there are many whose names the world has never heard, who have imitated Christ as nearly as they in labors of love. An aged outcast one night wandered to the door of a poor Christian. The wanderer was a beggar, and almost an idiot, but for Christ's sake she was received. Her new-found friend never grew weary of her care, but year

after year sustained her by the labor of her hands, dressing her wounds with a sister's tenderness, and praying with many tears for the salvation of her soul. When asked why she did so much for a stranger, she replied, "The love of Christ constrains me. Has He not said, Bring the poor that are cast out to your house?" (Is. 58:7.)

March 5

Matthew 5:1-10. Christ begins his sermon on the Mount by pronouncing the beatitudes.

The blessed Savior had been just engaged in healing the bodies of men, when he ascended the mountain to preach words that might save their *souls*. He opened his mouth to speak with a loud voice to the vast multitude. What heavenly words proceeded from those gracious lips! He began with pronouncing blessings; for he came to bless and to save. These eight blessings are called the beatitudes. They are very instructive, because they teach us whom Christ counts happy or blessed.

We all naturally desire happiness, but we fall into this great mistake—we think that we must have earthly good in order to be happy. Do not the people of this world show by their conduct, that if they were to speak the language of their hearts, they would say, "Blessed are those who have houses and lands—Blessed are those who enjoy health and long life—Blessed are those who are held in honor and reputation among men?" But God speaks very differently. He assures us that happiness is only to be found in his *presence*, and in *likeness* to himself. The Psalmist declares, "In your presence is fullness of joy;" and again, "I shall behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness." In order to become happy we must become holy like Him.

God will bestow upon us, in answer to our prayers, all the graces mentioned in these beatitudes—humility, penitence, meekness, spiritual desires, mercy, purity, love of peace-making, and joy in persecution. None but real Christians possess these dispositions. Unconverted people may sometimes *appear* to be meek. It is no doubt true that there are some people more meek by nature than others. But how different is natural **meekness** from that of the true Christian! He is meek, *not* because he does not *feel* an insult, *not* because he is *afraid* of showing resentment, *not* because he sees it is most to his *interest* to endure in silence; but—because he traces the hand of God in every injury man is permitted to inflict, because he knows that he *deserves* worse treatment than he receives, and because his Savior suffered far more for his sake. These are *some* of the motives which lie at the root of the Christian's meekness. When David was cursed by Shimei, he meekly replied, "Let him curse," because the Lord has said unto him, "Curse David." He felt that the Lord had appointed the chastisement, and he did not desire to resist it. This was the meekness, not of nature, but of

grace.

Some people are more **merciful** or kind-hearted by nature than others; but none exercise true mercy except those who have themselves received it from God. These are the only people who show mercy to the *souls* of men.

There are some also who naturally delight more than others in **making peace**; but the right motive must ever be lacking, where true religion is absent. How beautiful is the character of a Christian peacemaker! We might all do something in preventing quarrels, and in healing them. The children of Satan delight in seeing people divided, and often by their malicious tales create differences between friends—but the children of God delight in seeing hearts fondly attached to each other; and often by their kind efforts reunite the cord of love when it has been broken. Two celebrated ministers, Robert Hall and Charles Simeon, had quarreled; they refused to speak to each other; when John Owen, another eminent minister, adopted the following plan to reconcile them, after several others had been tried in vain. He wrote and left at the house of each these lines—

How rare that task a prosperous issue finds,
Which seeks to reconcile discordant minds!
How many scruples rise at passion's touch!
This yields too little, and *that* asks too much;
Each wishes each with others' eyes to see—
And *many* sinners can't make *two* agree.
What mediation then, the Savior showed,
Who *singly* reconciled us *all* to God!

It is said that upon receiving the lines, each minister left his residence to seek the other, and that they met in the street, where a perfect reconciliation took place.

This is an instance of the manner in which the true Christian makes peace between his brethren, and of the success with which God blesses his efforts.

Let us now turn to another of the beatitudes. "Blessed are the **pure in heart**—for they shall see God." All who know anything of their own hearts, must acknowledge that they are not by nature pure. We learn from the scriptures that the heart is purified by *faith*. (Acts 15:9.) When a man believes in Christ, his heart no longer delights in sin, but desires to be holy like God. Lest, however, any penitent sinner should be cast down by reading this verse, let me mention a little circumstance for his comfort.

When the Esquimaux, in North America, first obtained the Gospel of Matthew in their own language, they perused the sacred treasure with the greatest attention. One day the missionary found a poor lad weeping bitterly. He inquired the cause of his grief. The youth replied by pointing to the passage in the eighth verse of

this chapter. "Look there," said he, "it is only the pure in heart who shall see God; and I am not pure, so I can never see him." "But stop," said the missionary, (placing his finger on the fourth verse,) "read again, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

March 6

Matthew 5:11-16. *Christ prepares his disciples for persecution.*

The sermon which the Lord Jesus preached on the Mount astonished those that heard it. Who would have thought that the persecuted could rejoice? Yet Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you." There are a great many different kinds of persecution; but only one of them is mentioned in this place. It is a kind that some might not think very difficult to bear—the persecution of the *tongue*. "Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." But those who have endured this kind of persecution, know that it is very painful to the natural feelings. Yet all who follow Jesus must suffer it; for "if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matthew 10:25.)

Slander is a part of the martyr's portion. No man was ever yet put to death as a *good* man. His enemies take away his good name before they venture to murder him. Thus they did to Jesus. They said that he was a rebel and a blasphemer, before they crucified him. The most dreadful calumnies were spread abroad respecting the early Christians. The first persecution was set on foot by the emperor Nero, on the ground that the Christians had set fire to the city of Rome, though it is supposed he himself had committed the crime. When warriors expire on the field of battle, they know that their names will be honored by their countrymen; but martyrs often die amid the curses and insults of the multitude.

Many Christians have tried to escape persecution by concealing their religion. But the Lord Jesus does not approve such conduct. He has compared his people to two things, salt and light. Why has he compared them to **salt**? Because if salt has lost its savor, it is *utterly useless*. Thus, a Christian who hides his religion, or who disgraces it by his conduct, is useless. **Light** also is a great blessing; but if it is concealed, it is no blessing at all. There have been Christians, in countries where persecution was violent, who have concealed their sentiments even from their own children. In Bohemia, some fathers, when going to die, acknowledged that all their lives they had been Protestants in heart, but had not had courage to avow it. While they lived, they often retired into a shed to read the Bible, which they hid in the ground. But did these men give *light* unto all that were in the house? Were their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

The prophet Daniel acted in a very different manner, when, in spite of the king's

decree, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. There are two things which Christians must do if they would glorify God; they must lead holy lives, and openly acknowledge the Savior, in whom they believe. If they do not openly acknowledge him, how can they do him honor by their *lives*? **And if they do not lead holy lives, they disgrace the cause by making an open profession of his name.**

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We must expect that they will *now* speak evil of us; but afterwards, when they are in *affliction*, they may be led to turn to our God; according to the words of the apostle Peter, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the *day of visitation*." (1 Peter 2:12.)

March 7

Matthew 5:17-32. Christ explains the spiritual nature of the law.

It is a very common idea, that Christ came to set aside the law; but it is a mistaken one. He said himself, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill." He knew that man had broken it; and he came to fulfill it in his stead, and to bear the punishment due to man for breaking it. But he came to do still more; he came to take out of man's heart, his hatred of God's law. Forever since the fall, men have hated that law. As it is written, "The carnal mind is enmity against God—for it is not subject to the law of God—neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7.) The Pharisees professed to keep the law—but in their hearts they hated it.

No doubt it astonished the people exceedingly to hear Jesus declare, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven." But what sort of righteousness can those men have had, who in their hearts hated righteousness! But this was the case with the Pharisees, and it is the case with every unconverted man. The law is too holy to please such sinful creatures as we are by nature.

It may appear, at first sight, an easy thing to keep the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill." But if we think it easy to keep it, it is because we do not understand its spiritual meaning. It forbids not only the *act* of murder, but the *thought*. Hatred is the beginning of murder. This may be proved. When we hate a person, we do not like the *presence* of that person; we feel uncomfortable when he is near, and wish he were at a distance. This must have been Cain's first feeling against Abel. It was fostered in his bosom, until it led to murder. Before he murdered Abel with his *hand*, he murdered him in *thought*. And what is the beginning of hatred? It is anger.

There is a righteous anger. God is angry with the wicked; but if they would turn from their wickedness, his anger would cease; for he says, "Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." But sinful anger is very different from the anger of God; it is anger without a cause, or without a *sufficient* cause. Perhaps someone has slighted us and wounded our self-love; or, perhaps, he has gained some advantage that we should like to possess, and has excited our *envy*. Perhaps he has faithfully reproved us, or set us an example which makes us feel ashamed of our own conduct. This was the reason that Cain was angry with Abel, and it was the reason that the Pharisees were angry with Jesus. Worldly people are still angry with real Christians on the same account. How sinful is such anger! It is usually vented in abusive words. Raca and fool were terms of reproach used by the Jews. Raca signified "vain worthless fellow," and fool, "wicked and abandoned wretch."

And have none of us in our anger been led to use very improper expressions? Even little children sometimes utter very violent words in their fits of passion. And does not God notice these words? He does notice them, and though *we* may forget them, *He* will not. He is an adversary to the wicked, and will shut them up in a prison whence they can never escape. We are now going to pray to God. Do any of us cherish malice in our hearts? Malice is the worst kind of hatred. God will not accept the prayers or the praises of any person who hates his brother. It is a difficult thing to part with our sins. **Many people would rather part with a foot, or an eye, than with their sins. But we *must* part with them, or we shall be cast into hell.** Blessed be God, He will give new hearts to those who ask for them; He will make them righteous, and He will pardon all their sins for his dear Son's sake.

March 8

Matthew 5:33-37. *Christ forbids irreverent swearing.*

The Lord Jesus observes the expressions we use in our common conversation; he notices every reproachful word we utter to each other; he notices also every irreverent word we speak of God. He heard with displeasure the Jews of old calling their brethren raca and fool, and swearing by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, and by their own heads. Let us never forget that he still listens to our words, and is displeased with every profane expression, such as, "God bless us," "The Lord knows," "Upon my soul." Ungodly people are so much in the habit of uttering these exclamations, that they scarcely know when they use them. But they could not have acquired the habit, if they had felt reverence for the majesty of the Almighty God. But when men became sinners, they began to despise Him. If they were to hear his dreadful voice, they would be filled, as Adam was, with fear; but when they do not see him, they feel no dread, and care not how they

insult his name. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you use His name in vain."

But with what solemn awe the Son of God speaks of his Father! Even the heavens and earth are not common things in his sight. When we look up at the blue vault above our heads, we are gazing upon the throne of its Creator; and when we look around upon this green and smiling earth, we are gazing upon the footstool of its glorious Monarch—even our own heads are His, and not ours; for He made them, while we cannot make one hair, white or black. If men were not sinners, they would be satisfied with saying "yes" and "no," without using oaths to confirm their words. For Jesus said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one—or the evil *heart*."

There is one difficulty that may be urged respecting the rule Christ laid down. How is it that Paul in his epistles often appeals to God, saying, "God is my witness, I speak the truth in Christ; I lie not. I call God for a record upon my soul." Did Paul speak profanely? That is impossible, for he spoke by the Holy Spirit. It is therefore lawful to appeal to God on solemn important occasions; as in a court of *justice*, when our words may affect the life of a fellow-creature. It is even mentioned in Isaiah as a proof of piety in future days, that men instead of swearing by false gods, will swear by the true God. "He who swears in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth." (Is. 65:16.) In Deuteronomy also, God said, "You shall fear the Lord your God, and serve him, and swear by his name." (6:13.) It must therefore be lawful on some occasions to use solemn oaths.

How condescending God has been to us in having used an oath to confirm his promise to us! Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, and he said, "As I live." This he did to quiet the unbelieving fears of his own people. He says to each of those who have fled to Christ for pardon, "Surely blessing I will bless you." He adds his oath to his word, and says, "As I live." Thus by *two* immutable or unchangeable things, his word and his oath, he gives strong consolation to the poor penitent trembling at his footstool. He uses the same oath when He threatens to destroy His enemies. "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, 'I live forever.' If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold in judgment, I will render vengeance to my enemies, and will reward them that hate me." (Deut. 32:40, 41.) Well, then, may we fear this glorious and fearful name, "The Lord your God."

March 9

Matthew 5:38-42. *Christ forbids revenge.*

These directions have excited a great deal of surprise. It seems to proud man impossible that God should expect him to bear injuries without complaint, or desire of revenge. Let us inquire in what manner these directions are to be

understood. The words, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," are the words of God, and Jesus did not *contradict* his Father's words, which were his own also, but he *explained* them. The Pharisees had misunderstood them, and represented them falsely to the people. Those words, "eye for eye," were a direction given to the civil authorities. See Ex. 21. It was to be their rule of punishment. If a man put out another man's eye, the civil authority might not take away his *life* on that account, but might assign a punishment equal to the injury he had inflicted. But this command was never intended to encourage revenge. The judge executes justice for the *public* good, and men may bring others to justice on the same account; but they may not practice *private* revenge from feelings of hatred and anger.

The Pharisees had explained this law very poorly, and had deceived the people. Jesus told them that far from revenge being allowable, we ought to suffer personal injuries without complaint, or resistance. He did not forbid us to remonstrate with our enemies, when we had the opportunity; for it is right to do all we can to deter others from committing sin. He himself expostulated with the man who dared to smite his cheek, as he stood before the high priest, saying, "If I have spoken *evil*, bear witness of the evil; but if *well*, why do you smite me?" (John 18:23.)

When our Christian brethren trespass against us, we are bound to rebuke them, (though with mildness,) for it is written, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall rebuke him, and not allow him to sin." (Lev. 19:17.)

Are we not then to turn the left cheek to him that has smitten us on the right? The command is to be obeyed in the *spirit*, rather than in the *letter*. And what is the *spirit* of the command? It is a willingness to yield up our rights. We owe duties to others, and others owe duties to us. Now by nature we are apt to think *little* of the duties which we owe to others, and *much* of the *duties* they owe to us; that is, we think little of our duties, and much of our *rights*. We are inclined to watch the conduct of others towards us, and to feel angry when they do not behave as we think they ought. This is a ruinous course of thought; it not only makes us unhappy in THIS world, by leading us to feel dissatisfied and revengeful, but it endangers our happiness in the next, by taking off our thoughts from Christ, our atonement, and our example.

It is *useless* to think of **the duties of others to us**; they ought not perhaps to expect so much from us, or to behave to us with such disrespect, or with such harshness; but by dwelling on these subjects, we do not improve *their* conduct, but lose our *own* peace. On the contrary, it is most *useful* to think of **the duties we owe to others**, because we shall have to account for all our conduct at the last day. *Then* to have been ill-treated will be nothing, but to have ill-treated others will be dreadful. If we are engaged upon this profitable subject, we shall often not *observe* when our fellow-creatures behave ill to us, and thus we shall miss many occasions of uneasiness, and also of sin. But if we *do* observe any

ingratitude, or unkindness, there is one great use we may make of the trial; we may examine whether there is no person to whom we have behaved in a similar manner. It is almost certain that we shall remember having done something *like* the offence we have received, to some of our fellow-creatures; but at all events, we shall find that there is *One* to whom we have behaved *far, far* more ungratefully than any have behaved to us. All that our fellow-creatures can do to us is but a faint shadow of the manner in which we have insulted God. What has He not a right to expect from us! If a man had expended all his property in ransoming a poor prisoner, would he not expect some grateful return for his generosity? But God has given up his only Son for our sakes. O sacrifice surpassing human thought! And how have we behaved towards him? How coldly! How unfaithfully! What reluctant obedience have we rendered! More frequently still, what open *disobedience!*

This consideration should make us very meek when we receive injuries. If it really sinks into our *hearts*, we shall become less ready to complain of others, and more earnest in our endeavors to behave well to them.

March 10

Matthew 5:43 to end. *Christ enjoins the forgiveness of enemies.*

It is written in Lev. 19, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The Pharisees for many ages past had given a very imperfect explanation of this law. They had not explained the term "neighbor" aright. They had declared that it applied to those who loved us, and did not include those who hated us. But this was not true. Every human being is, in one sense, our neighbor. We are therefore commanded to love all. God had never said, "You shall hate your enemy;" for, though he had desired the Jews to form no friendships with heathen nations, he had never commanded them to hate or injure them from feelings of revenge. It was man who had added, "You shall hate your enemy." How easy it was to obey such a law! By nature we love our friends, and hate our enemies. As Christ said, "Even the *publicans* love those who love them." The publicans were people of very bad character, who generally defrauded in collecting the taxes, and who were therefore much despised—yet even *they* behaved with kindness and respect to their particular friends. The Pharisees had no reason to be proud of such righteousness as this.

Well might our Savior say to his disciples, "Except your righteousness shall *exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Yet this is the sort of righteousness which men are still inclined to think sufficient to entitle them to everlasting happiness. How often people say, "Have I not been a good mother to my children, a faithful friend, a kind brother—what harm have I done?" They claim a reward from God for such goodness as this! But our Savior expects far more from his disciples; he

expects them to love those who hate them; to speak kindly to them, in spite of their abusive words, and to pray for them, notwithstanding repeated injuries. And yet even this conduct deserves no reward, because it is no more than our duty.

Do we say, how is it possible for us to do this? It *is* impossible, without a new heart. We are too *sinful* to do it. Those who have been renewed by grace are enabled to love their enemies. The missionaries who went to Greenland to dwell amid plains of snow and mountains of ice, were treated in the most unkind manner by the natives. Once the ship that was to have brought them provisions did not arrive at the expected time, and they were reduced to the brink of famine; for they could not procure food by hunting seals, as the natives did. The cruel Greenlanders mocked at their sufferings, and refused to help them. At length the ship containing provisions arrived. The missionaries might have gone back in it to their native country, but they remained in Greenland. Soon afterwards, many of the people were in need of food, as through their improvidence their summer stores were exhausted. Did the missionaries refuse to feed them? They shared their little supplies with them. The people were attacked with the smallpox; the missionaries nursed them with the greatest tenderness. This conduct had a great effect in softening the minds of the heathen towards their teachers, and in preparing them to receive their message. It is by such behavior we may show that we are the children of God.

How does God behave towards ungrateful man? Our Savior reminded his disciples that God sent rain, and the light of day, to all, even to those who hated him. But he did not *then* speak of a still *greater* proof of love—the gift of his Son. For a righteous man some might even dare to die; but God commends his love towards us, in that while we were yet *enemies*, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son. This shows us what kind of love we ought to feel for our enemies. The *same kind* that God feels for us. *Not* the love of **approbation**, (*that* we can only feel for the *righteous*,) but the love of **compassion**. It is *this* love that God felt for the world when he gave his Son to die for it. To love an enemy is to be *perfect*; for it is to have charity, the bond of perfectness. If we have this charity, this love to all, we are like God, though our love can never be so great as His.

If we earnestly desire the salvation of our enemies, then we may know that we are the children of God. Let us endeavor to melt their hearts by acts of kindness. Such efforts are often blessed to the conversion of sinners. A holy man was once, for the truth's sake, shut up in a prison, and obliged to share the cell with a murderer. The conduct of his wicked companion was so intolerable, that his fellow-prisoner complained of him to those who overlooked the prison. An order was issued that the murderer should be removed to another dungeon. When the unhappy man heard to what place he was to be committed, his dismay was great, for he knew that the damp and closeness of that dungeon would cut short his life in a few days. He implored his fellow-prisoner, with many tears, to ask that the sentence might be reversed. The holy man felt that it was his duty to yield to

these entreaties. He requested that the murderer might be permitted to remain with him. His petition was granted, but with this condition, that he should complain no more of the conduct of his companion. The murderer was melted by the generosity of the man he had once hated and annoyed. He fell at his feet, and with tears of gratitude implored his pardon. Henceforth he listened to his instructions, and through the grace of God, repented, and believed the Gospel.

March 11

Matthew 6:1-4. *Christ forbids ostentation in GIVING.*

The Lord Jesus now began to show the emptiness of the *good works* in which the Pharisees gloried. He had declared what false views they entertained of the *law of God*, and now he shows **that their best actions were nothing worth, because they were done from wrong motives.**

Let us remember that he said, in the early part of the sermon, that except our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Here is an instance of what their righteousness was. They sometimes bestowed large sums of money on the poor, or on the service of the temple; but their desire was to be seen of *men*. They did not care so much for God's favor, as for men's admiration. Therefore they took care to have their charities *known*. They did not *literally* sound a trumpet before them; but they endeavored as much to attract notice, as if they had sounded a trumpet. **They *did* gain much praise from men, and this was their reward, and their *only* reward.**

We all by nature care for the praise of men more than for the praise of God. The reason is, that we have no faith. We see men, we hear their praise; but we do not see God, nor hear his voice. But when a person has faith, he begins to value God's favor more than the praise of men. To hear every human tongue united in applauding him, would not give him as much delight as the hope of hearing God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Now the point we should examine is this—Which are we most anxious to obtain, the praise of men or the favor of God?

It may sometimes be best that our charities should be *known*. David, for instance, gave the gold and silver he had saved for the temple in a *public* manner. But *why*? Not to gain praise, but to encourage others to give also. Should we even *hide* our charities, and at the same time *desire* that they should be discovered, God would not be pleased with us. He looks at the heart. He wants us to act to him alone. We ought not to think that our charities *deserve* to have a reward from God. If we do them with this idea they will not be acceptable.

What can we give to God? Nothing worthy of his acceptance. All we can bestow are but like the flowers that the cottager may gather from his garden, and present to the monarch as a slender token of his gratitude for the gift of his cottage, and for his garden, and for all that he possesses. A gracious sovereign would not refuse the gift, if *humbly* offered, though the flowers were common, and though his own garden contained the rarest and the finest; but if the cottager presented them to gain the praise of his neighbors, or thinking he conferred a great favor upon his king, both the offering and the offerer would deserve to be rejected. And shall those who give money for God's service in such a spirit, be accepted? Cornelius gave alms from the overflowings of a grateful heart, therefore the angel said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up as a memorial before God," (Acts 10:4.) The poor widow gave her two mites with a single eye to God's glory. She gave her *heart* with them, or it would not have been said of her, "She gave more than they all." Mary poured the ointment on the head of Jesus, under a deep sense of her own unworthiness, and of the preciousness of her Savior; therefore Jesus accepted the service, and has caused it to be remembered through all ages. All we do from a feeling of grateful love to *Him*, who laid down his life for us, shall be remembered by God, when the costly gifts of ostentation shall be buried in eternal forgetfulness.

March 12

Matthew 6:5-8. Christ forbids ostentation in PRAYER.

Our Savior continued to expose the emptiness of the works in which the Pharisees prided themselves. One of these was *giving*. This has been *already* considered. Another was *prayer*. Let us now direct our attention to this subject. The customs of Judea were very different from ours. The synagogues were always open, and people resorted to them, as well as to the temple, in order to pray. There was no harm in the custom, and many people no doubt went to the synagogues to pray in sincerity, as we know one poor tax-collector went to the temple, and sincerely said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

But others went only to be *seen of men*. There were also certain hours of the day at which the Pharisees said certain prayers; and if at these hours they found themselves in the streets, they stopped to repeat their task; and for this purpose preferred the corner of a street to a more private place. Jesus bade his disciples avoid such ostentatious conduct, and advised them to retire to their closets to pray, and to conceal from the world their communion with their heavenly Father.

If we really love God, we shall pray to him in secret. It is clear, that if we pray in church and in the family, but neglect secret prayer, we are only seeking human approbation.

It is a great proof, both of *faith* and *love*, to be frequent in secret prayer. If we

were told that a departed friend was hovering near us, though unseen, and that he could hear us, though he could not answer us aloud, should we feel inclined to speak to him? This would depend upon two circumstances—*first*, upon our faith in the statement, that is, upon our really believing that the friend was near; and secondly, upon our *love* for this friend—If we both believed he was near, and loved him, we would find great delight in talking to him. "He who comes to God, must believe that he *is*." If we doubt whether God hears us, no wonder we find prayer a burdensome task. If, also, we do not *love* God, how can we find it pleasant to speak to him? But if we believe that he is very near us, and if we love him with fond attachment, O how delightful to shut our closet door, and to pour out our hearts before him! And will he give us a *reward* for doing so? What! A reward to his needy creatures, for calling upon him for help! The reward will be, He will answer our petitions as He has promised, and at the last acknowledge us as His children.

Jesus also tells us in what *manner* we should pray. It is not words alone that move God. The heathen think they shall be heard for *much speaking*, and say, Baal, hear us, Baal, hear us. The Roman Catholics repeat the Lord's prayer many hundreds of times, and count the numbers upon their string of beads. But of what use are such prayers; for what are *words* without *desires*? We should *use words*, because in using them our *desires* grow stronger; but words without desires are but unmeaning noise. A Christian poet beautifully describes the nature of prayer in the following lines—

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed;
The hidden motion of a fire
That trembles in the bosom.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.

Sometimes the *mouth* cannot express what the *heart* feels. But sometimes the soul feels dead, and we cannot pray in spirit and in truth. An unconverted heart is always dead; but even the renewed heart has seasons of barrenness. How are desires to be stirred up? Take the Scriptures—consider the things revealed in them—Heaven, Hell, God, the Judge of all—the crucified Savior—a precious soul—a fleeting life. Is there nothing you desire to escape? Nothing you desire to possess? Have you nothing to say to Him who can do everything for you, and who has done so much already? What would many a lost soul give for such an opportunity as you now possess? God, who sees your efforts, will send his Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray. Let us remember that prayer is our safety; without prayer we must be lost. When a person can receive no nourishment, we give him up; we know he must die if he can take nothing. If we cannot *pray*, we must perish.

March 13

Matthew 6:9-13. *The Lord's Prayer.*

This prayer is so familiar to us, that we are in great danger of not considering its weighty meaning. A prayer taught by our blessed Savior himself ought to engage our deepest attention. Had we been told that such a prayer had been given, and had never heard the words, how we would have desired to hear them!

We ought not to suppose that we are bound to use this prayer every time we pray. Jesus said, "After this *manner* pray." We find in this prayer a pattern for our prayers.

We see in what way we should address God, and what kind of petitions we may present. The title we are allowed to give to Him is the tenderest that can be conceived—Our Father. He is our *Father*, because he made us in his own image; but by *sin*, we became children of the devil. How then are we restored to our Father? By Jesus Christ. He became our brother in the *flesh*, that we might become *his* brethren in the *spirit*. He makes us the children of God by faith in him. Thus he said to Mary Magdalene, after he rose from the dead, "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and to *your* Father, and to my God, and to *your* God."

Our Father is a *king* also; but a dethroned king. His subjects have risen up in rebellion against him. Therefore his children entreat him to return. His return is the darling wish of their hearts. It is a great sign of faithfulness in subjects, when they maintain allegiance to a sovereign who is in banishment. At such a time it is dangerous to be faithful; for if discovered in sending letters to their monarch, inviting him to take possession of his throne, they would be regarded as enemies by their rebellious countrymen. Yet faithful subjects would be continually forming plans for the restoration of their lawful sovereign, and would run all risks rather than desert him. The children of God feel and act in this manner while they live in the world. Their desire is, that their Father's name should be hallowed, praised, and adored; that his kingdom should come, and that his will should be done on earth, as it is in heaven. In their prayers they express this desire *first*, and they endeavor to promote its fulfillment by persuading men to submit to their king. Nor shall their desires and efforts be disappointed, for God shall one day be king over all the earth. We see, therefore, that only converted people can offer this prayer in sincerity, for none who are not converted long for God to be acknowledged as king.

The next requests relate to such things as we desire for *ourselves*. In the first place we ask for bread; not for a *great* supply, but daily *bread*. Then we ask for the forgiveness of sins, declaring at the same time that we have forgiven others

their sins against us. Thus we see that this prayer suits none whose hearts cherish hatred and revenge; for if we do *not* forgive those who offend us, every time we use this prayer we are pronouncing our own condemnation, and asking God *not* to forgive us.

We have before remarked, that this prayer is only fit for those who love *God*, because they ask that his kingdom may come and his will be done. We now see that it is only fit for those who love *man* also; and we know that those who do love God, love their fellow-creatures also. These are the two great commandments—Love God and love your neighbor. When people believe in Christ they have new hearts, and they begin to love God and man. Then this prayer suits them. They still have sins to be forgiven, and it is **the sense of God's grace in forgiving them, that makes them so ready to forgive others.** When God has forgiven them a debt of thousands of pounds, how can they exact a debt of a few pence from their fellows! They feel that no one has acted towards them as ungratefully as they have towards God, and so their mouths are stopped from uttering reproaches against their fellow-creatures.

A penitent sinner hates sin. He can say from the heart, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, (or the evil one.*)" By nature we delight in temptation and in evil. All our pleasures are temptations; we are always running into it and longing for it. But the Christian dreads temptation; therefore he does not desire to be rich, nor to run with the crowds, nor to obtain high praise, because he knows he might be tempted to be proud, and foolish, and to forget God.

The prayer is ended as it was begun—with the praise of God. Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. This is the consolation of the child of God; though none may acknowledge his Father, yet he knows his Father is glorious, and that some day his glory will be displayed before an assembled universe.

Christ would not have given his people such a prayer, if he had not determined to *grant* it. He knows what he will do, and he delights to hear us asking him to perform his gracious designs. Then let every devout soul say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

March 14

Matthew 6:14, 15. *Christ declares whom God will forgive.*

Jesus here gives some instructions concerning the frame of mind in which prayer must be made. In the Lord's prayer we are directed to say, "Forgive us our debts, or trespasses, as we forgive our debtors, or those who have sinned against us." This petition seems like asking God *not* to forgive us if we do *not* forgive others. Some people might have been induced to wish that some part of the sentence

was omitted, and that they were instructed simply to ask God to forgive them, whether they forgave others or not. But it would be of no use to make such a prayer; for God is determined not to forgive us unless we forgive others.

It is therefore necessary that we should inquire whether we really forgive them; for our hearts are so deceitful that we are apt to imagine we forgive, when we still harbor a grudge against an offending brother. What then are the signs of having really forgiven an offender? When we have heartily forgiven him, we cease to indulge the *thought* of his offence, and we take no pleasure in *speaking* of it. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither wish evil to befall him, nor feel glad if it do befall him; but, on the contrary, wish all manner of good to happen to him. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither speak bitterly of him *ourselves*, nor do we feel gratified if we hear *others* speak harshly of him. This last, perhaps, is the best test of our state of feeling; for some who would not dare to speak harshly of an enemy themselves, would be glad to hear others do so. These should be our feelings even towards one who has *not* asked our forgiveness; but if our offending brother ask us to forgive him, we ought to restore him to friendship and endearment, and our heart ought to be towards him as before—and thus we ought to continue to act, in spite of *repeated* offences.

Is it an *easy thing* thus to forgive? No! it is *impossible* to nature, and can only be done through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts a sense of our own unworthiness, filling us with love to God for his mercy towards us, and then with love to our fellow-creatures.

Though thousands offer this prayer of our Lord every day, it is only accepted from those whose hearts are renewed by grace. Before our *prayers* are accepted, we *ourselves* must be accepted. Cain's *sacrifice* was not accepted by God, because he *himself* was not accepted. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, because he himself was accepted. Would we, therefore, offer acceptable prayers, we must first give our own selves to the Lord; we must come in the name of Jesus, and on account of his sacrifice that he offered on the cross, God will accept *us*, renew our hearts by his grace, and answer our prayers. God will not be mocked. Man would gladly put God off with formal, heartless prayers; but He will not receive them. He spurns the offering, and says, "Who has required this at *your* hands—to tread my courts? When you spread forth your hands I will hide my eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers I will not hear." (Is. 50:12-15.)

But let no penitent sinner be discouraged by these declarations. We may come with our sins to Christ, if they are a grief and a burden to us, for it is **He alone who can forgive them, and it is He alone who can subdue them**. His Holy Spirit will make us *hate* our sins, help us to strive against them, and enable us to overcome them.

March 15

Matthew 5:16-18. Christ forbids ostentation in FASTING.

There was another duty upon the performance of which the Pharisees prided themselves—fasting. Some of them fasted twice a week. On those days they neglected the care of their persons, and went abroad that men might see they fasted, and admire them for their religiosity. In the day of a *public* fast for the sins of the *nation*, men should not conceal that they fast; but, like the king of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, they should set an example of penitence and self-denial. But when men fast for their *own* sins, then they ought to conceal the deed, and not seek to obtain human praise.

The scriptures teach us that fasting is a duty. It brings down the spirits, and sobers the mind; and, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, disposes the soul for prayer and meditation. But there are some people, whose health is so delicate, that it would be injured by long fasting. It surely cannot be a duty for them to fast, for they would thus be less fit to pray.

But *all* should beware of excess in food, which drowns the soul, and renders it sensual and stupid. It is written concerning one of the most wicked cities of old, "Pride, FULLNESS OF BREAD, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters," (or inhabitants.) This fullness made them haughty, and brought on their destruction. (Ez. 16:48, 50.) Let none think that they are too pious to stand in need of such a warning. Christ warns his *own* disciples against gluttony and drunkenness—"Take heed lest at any time your *hearts* be overcharged with excessiveness and drunkenness." (Luke 21:34.) Constant moderation in food and drink is as important to the soul as to the body.

But when we fast let us beware of *PRIDE*; for as dead flies spoil the most fragrant ointment, so pride mars the most self-denying actions. We should perform religious duties secretly, when we are among those who will think highly of us for observing them. This rule applies to fastings, prayer, reading the scripture, and doing good. But when we are among those who would ridicule us for religion, then is the time boldly to confess our Master, and to show that we are not ashamed of him. How easy it is to speak against vain amusements, to quote the scriptures, and to make pious remarks in the presence of religious people—but how difficult, when surrounded by scoffers, to be faithful to Christ! **We need a lively sense of the presence of God, that we may always act as in his sight, neither courting the smiles of our fellow-creatures, nor fearing their frowns; neither seeking their *applause*, nor shrinking from their ridicule.** Let us labor to be accepted of *Him*, to whom we must each give an account. In that solemn hour how worthless will the *praises* of our fellow-creatures appear, their *censures* how harmless!

March 16

Matthew 6:19-23. Christ forbids covetousness and double-mindedness.

Our Savior had exposed the apparently *good* actions of the Pharisees, as their prayers, fastings, almsgivings. He now reproves their *wicked* practices. The first thing he attacks is their *covetousness*,—their delight in laying up earthly treasures. In those days riches consisted partly in valuable *clothes*, and therefore He speaks of moth and rust corrupting.

The Lord shows, in the first place, the *folly* of covetousness. Riches make themselves wings, and fly away. How foolish, then, to set the heart upon them! But if we do not *lose* them, we must *leave* them. We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out; it is therefore evident to *reason*, that if there is another world in which we shall *eternally* dwell, we ought to be extremely anxious to lay up treasures there.

But *how* are we to lay up treasures in heaven? By good works. Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, says, "Charge those who are rich in this world that they do good, that they be *rich in good works*, ready to distribute; willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." But some may inquire, "Can we gain heaven by good works?" O no. Jesus Christ has gained heaven by *his* righteousness, and he freely *bestows* this heaven on all who believe in him. We cannot lay up treasures there, until we have believed in Him. We lay up treasures there, when we do things that please God. Good works are the fruits of faith. It is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." It is added, "Their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13.) These blessed dead had believed in Christ; therefore their works were accepted. The Pharisees could not please God; they could not lay up treasures in heaven. And why not? Because the eyes of their minds were shut; and they saw not the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

How great is the darkness of the unawakened mind! God alone, by his Holy Spirit, can enlighten this darkness. Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Has he given it to us? Our actions show whether he has or not. When we see a blind person, we are not always aware at first that he is blind; but if we watch him closely we soon discover his condition. If a mad dog pass near him, he does not try to avoid it; and if the most splendid illuminations be displayed, he does not stop to admire. The *actions* of men show clearly whether they are blind or not. **Unawakened souls evince no dread of hell, no desire after heaven, no contempt for earth, no love for Christ.** God frowns, but they are not alarmed; He stretches out his arms, but they perceive it not; He opens the gate of heaven, they do not strive to enter it; He points to the abyss of hell, they do not shrink back; He lifts up his crucified Son, they are not softened, or subdued.

There is an eye to the mind—if that eye be shut, we can do nothing right. This is

what our Lord meant when he declared, "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye be single, (or clear,) your whole body shall be full of light; but if your eye be evil, (or blind,) your whole body shall be full of darkness." When the eye of the mind is made clear, then we begin to *act* aright, and not until then.

Do we wish to know where *our* treasure is? Let us inquire where our heart is. They are in the same place. If our *affections* are set on things above, then we may know that we have *treasures* there; but if our *heart* is in our possessions, whether they be few or many, small or great, there our *treasure* is. Some unhappy people have shown in their last hours that their hearts were fixed upon some earthly trifles. A vain and foolish girl has been haunted in her expiring moments by the thoughts of her new dresses. A miser has been known eagerly to clench paper in his trembling hands, thinking it was his money. Had these dying people possessed treasures in heaven, they would not have clung so closely to their perishing property on earth.

March 17

Matthew 6:24 to end. *Christ forbids worldly anxiety.*

Our Savior had charged his disciples not to lay up treasures upon earth. In this passage He gives them another command that appears much more difficult to obey, that is, He forbids them to be **anxious** about needful food and clothing. We are naturally inclined to think it impossible *not* to be anxious about the means of our support; but God graciously offers many arguments to prevent our indulging in such cares.

Do we doubt God's power to provide for us? Who was it gave us *life*, and made our bodies? Is it not much easier to clothe, and to feed, than to create us? Do we doubt the *kindness* of the Lord? Does He not condescend to feed the ravens, and clothe the lilies? And are we not much *better* than they, that is, much more precious in his sight than birds or flowers? Therefore we see that we dishonor God by doubting whether He will provide for our needs.

It is also *useless* to be anxious about the future. By being anxious, we cannot add one inch to our height, nor one moment to our lives. We know from other parts of scripture, that God does not desire us to be idle or improvident—he only forbids useless tormenting fears about the future.

And why does He forbid such thoughts? Because there is a nobler object set before us, which requires *all* our thoughts—"The kingdom of God and his righteousness." This kingdom we must seek *earnestly*, or we shall not obtain it. If our thoughts are occupied about earthly things, we shall lose this earthly inheritance. Christ said, "You cannot serve God and mammon," (or the world.) Neither can we be intent upon what we shall eat, and drink, and wear, and at the

same time be seeking God. Christ said, that the Gentiles thought of these things. The Gentiles at that time were ignorant heathens, they knew not God, therefore they were occupied with earthly cares; but we ought not to be like them.

If we wish to discover our state before God, let us examine with what subjects our thoughts are generally occupied. Of course, while we are engaged upon any business, our minds must be on that business; but after it is done, **our thoughts fly to the objects we most delight in.** If we are God's children, our thoughts will often fly to heaven, our Father's house; but if we are not born again they will grovel upon the earth. This is God's own rule, "Those who are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit."

It may appear to us a trifling sin to be engrossed with earthly thoughts; but it is a sign that we are in the flesh, not born again of the Spirit. Now it is written, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8:8.) How dreadful it would be to die in this state!

How kindly God undertakes to keep us from need, while we are seeking spiritual blessings with all our hearts! "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

How happy should we be even in this world, if we would obey this command! "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is much *pleasanter* to be thinking of heaven and Christ, than to be dwelling upon the evils of life; and O! how much *safer* is it! For though it is useless to take thought about *earthly* things, it is of the greatest use to take thought about *spiritual* things. By thinking of **hell** we shall be led to flee from it; by thinking of **sin**, to dread it; by thinking of **righteousness**, to implore God to bestow it upon us, even Christ's righteousness upon us His guilty creatures.

March 18

Matthew 7:1-6. Christ forbids hypocritical judgment.

The Lord Jesus had been warning his disciples against many of the evil practices of the Pharisees. There was no sin to which they were more addicted than to "judging." They did not judge righteous judgment, according to the word of God; but they judged according to their own wicked passions. Because they hated Christ, they endeavored to find faults in his conduct, and accused him of breaking the Sabbath, of encouraging sinners, and of being a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. The men of the world still walk in the steps of the Pharisees—they are **continually looking with a malicious eye for faults in the children of God, and attributing wrong motives to all their actions.**

We may be sure that such judgment is sinful, because it is passed in a spirit of *hatred*. In how different a spirit the Christian judges! He cannot but know that the world lies in wickedness; he sees it with grief, and exerts all his powers to persuade sinners to flee from the wrath to come. By this rule we may know whether we are judging righteously or unrighteously. **Do we rejoice over the faults of others, or do we lament over them! If we are seeking for their faults, and watching for their halting, then we have the spirit of the Pharisees**, who maliciously watched the conduct of Christ and his disciples; then we may be sure that we are offending God, that we shall be judged by him, and that with the same measure we judge others, will be measured to us; for "*he shall have judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy.*" (James 2:13.) It is in this spirit that irreligious people judge those whom they call "evangelicals and saints." They accuse them of hypocrisy, and of pride; they watch their conduct with an eagle's eye, and triumph over their infirmities with a demon's joy. Such people have a beam in their own eye. This beam prevents them from seeing their *own* sins. We may be assured, that if we do not see *ourselves* to be very great and miserable sinners, there is a beam of unbelief in our eyes which prevents our seeing it. **While we cannot see our own sins, we cannot see the sins of others aright. What we call sins in them, perhaps are not sins.** We do not know how to reprove until we have discovered what sinners we *ourselves* are.

But when God, by his converting grace, takes the beam out of our eyes, then we may help our brother to overcome *his* sins. Then we shall warn him in a spirit of humility and love, feeling our own unworthiness, and anxious for his good.

But there are some characters, in dealing with whom great caution must be used. Hypocrites may be compared to dogs and swine. As these animals feed on carrion and the vilest garbage, so hypocrites delight in sin. It would be wrong to give holy food, such as the priests ate, to dogs; and it would be foolish to cast pearls, such as queens wear, to swine.

But is it wrong or foolish to declare the holy and precious word of God to wicked men? O no—for Jesus said to his apostles, "Preach the gospel to every creature." But when men, having heard the truth, trample it under foot by their blasphemies, and turn and rend by their revilings, those who speak it, then they must be left to themselves. In this manner the apostle Paul dealt with the wicked Jews of Corinth. "And when they opposed them and blasphemed, he shook his clothing." "Your blood be upon your own heads—I am clean—from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles!" (Acts 18:6.) Thus the apostle left the dogs and swine, that he might feed the sheep committed to his charge.

March 19

Matthew 7:7-11. Christ promises that prayer shall be answered.

This is one of the most encouraging passages in the whole Scriptures. How

many have been led by this invitation to approach the throne of grace! Here is not only an *invitation* which assures you of a welcome, but also a *promise* of success—your petition shall be granted, "for *everyone* who asks receives."

Christ knew how apt we are to doubt the love of our Heavenly Father. Therefore he appealed to all the parents present, and said, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread—will he give him a stone?" Every parent who heard this question must have felt that he could not treat his child in so unfeeling a manner—much less would he give his child a serpent instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. There are in the East white scorpions, about the size of an egg; but no parent would deceive and mock his child by giving him that venomous animal instead of wholesome food.

There are few who cannot recollect the kindness their parents showed to them in their helpless days. There are few who have no recollection of a father's or a mother's love. In childhood we knew not its value, but in later years it melts our hearts to think of it. How readily our dear parents listened to our requests! They were not always able to grant them, and sometimes they saw it would not be well to give us what we desired. But they never denied us food when we needed it. They would rather have gone without it themselves, than have seen us suffering from hunger. How carefully they guarded us from everything that would injure us! They warned us not to approach too near the fire, or the water, and not to touch poisonous berries or dangerous animals. Far from giving us a scorpion, they would have been terrified, if they had seen it in our hands. And does God feel the same tenderness for his children? Hear what Jesus says, who came forth from the bosom of the Father—"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how *much more* shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"

But if any trembling soul should reply, "How can I be sure that He is *my* Father? He is not the Father of the wicked," let him know that none but the children of God ask him for *good* things. The little lamb is shown to belong to its own mother by running to her to be fed. The children of Satan do not desire to have those things which God has promised. They seek for an earthly portion. They never *really* pray. When they are miserable, they often complain, but these complaints are not prayers. God said of Israel, "They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds," (Hos. 7:14.) Sometimes in distress they make vows, as well as complaints. But are their vows prayers? God calls them flatteries, and lies. "Nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with him," (Ps. 78:36.) How different from these were the prayers of David! He could say to God, "I entreated your favor with my whole heart." And he could also say, "Blessed be the Lord because He has heard the voice of my supplications." Every one who is now earnestly seeking God shall sooner or later say the same. Therefore, "let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord," (Ps. 105:3.)

March 20

Matthew 7:12-14. *Christ describes the wrong and the right way.*

Who can hear our Savior's **golden rule** without approving it! And who can hear it without condemning himself! "Do for others what you would like them to do for you." He who has kept the same is a perfect man, and has done all the law and prophets taught. We must confess with sorrow that we have broken it a thousand times, and that we need pardon through the Savior's blood for these manifold transgressions. But though we have transgressed, yet if we desire to please God, we shall find this rule an admirable guide. **God knows our ignorance, and has graciously furnished us with a rule that will apply to every circumstance in which we can be placed.** On every occasion we should imagine ourselves to be in the place of our neighbor, and say, (for instance,) "If I were a parent, how would I expect my child to behave towards me; if I were a child, my parent; if I were a master, how would I require my servant to conduct himself; if I were a servant, how would I wish my master to deal with me; if I were suffering pain, what would I desire the healthy to do to alleviate my misery; if I were sunk in poverty, what would I think the rich ought to do, when they beheld my destitution?"

We may go further still, and say, "If I were a perishing heathen, now standing before the bar of God, what would I then think Christians ought to have done for me?" We must, however, ask these questions with *this* condition—"What would it be reasonable for me to expect another to do for me, if I were in his circumstances?"

How ill can we bear to be examined by this rule! And yet we have behaved *far, far better* to our *fellow-creatures* than we have to *God*.

Our Savior, by his next declaration, has often excited astonishment and anxiety. He declared that the gate of life was strait, and that the way was narrow; by which he meant that men find it difficult to be truly religious. **The narrow way is not broader now than it was when these words were first spoken, and still there are but few who find it.** And if there are but *few* who find it, let us never conclude that any practice is right, because *many* indulge in it. The way in which *many* walk must be wrong. If we would please God and save our souls, we must be singular.

In the broad way there are many *travelers*, and there are many *paths* in which those travelers walk. People of all sorts of character walk in it; the spend-thrift, and the miser; the pleasure-lover, and the self-righteous religionist—and each different kind of character condemns the other. Yet they are all alike in this respect, they do not love God, nor do his will; and they are *all* hastening (however little they may think it) to the *same*

destruction.

Christians, on the contrary, all walk in the same path. They are all alike in spirit, though some are more excellent than others. They enter in at the same strait gate, that is, they believe in the same Savior. Though they come from the opposite ends of the world, yet they know each other's minds, and sympathize with each other's feelings. The greatest king and the lowest beggar have a sympathy with each other, if they both love Christ.

Yet this narrow way is little sought. The reason is, men cannot bear the sacrifices which they must make before they can enter in, they do not like to give up their pleasure and their pride. If they would walk in this narrow way, they would find it pleasant. In some places it is steep, and in others it is rough; but the *blessed end* makes it pleasant. It is a prospect that would make any path pleasant. It is a prospect that grows brighter as the traveler proceeds; it is the prospect of the everlasting hills, crowned with the golden city and the pearly gates. And the *Companion* makes it pleasant. He is at once the Guard, the Guide, the Friend of all who walk in the narrow way.

And though but *few* walk in it *now*, yet in the home to which it leads a multitude shall be found, yes, a multitude without number; for in *every* age, there have been *some* who traveled in this path, and in the ages yet to come there shall be many more. The broad road shall not be always thronged. When Satan, who now deceives the world, shall be shut up in prison, then the broad way shall be forsaken, the people shall be *all* righteous, and none shall say any more to his neighbor, "Know the Lord," for *all* shall "know Him from the greatest to the least." Our journey may be lonely, but our Father's house shall not be *empty*. There are *many* mansions in it, and not one of them shall lack a blessed inhabitant. Then will our divine Lord be satisfied, when he beholds gathered around Him his innumerable family.

And shall the straitness of the gate deter us from seeking to enter in? Or shall the narrowness of the way induce us to turn back? It would be well to go through fire and water to attain such an inheritance. But the *sufferings* of this way are far less than its *consolations*, and these cannot be *compared* with its *end*. "I reckon," said the apostle Paul, "that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," (Rom. 8:18.)

March 21

Matthew 7:15-20. Christ warns against false prophets.

Our Savior had been showing his disciples the necessity of walking in the narrow way to heaven. He knew that many false teachers would arise, who would point out an easier way; and the Pharisees at that very time encouraged people, by

their instructions and example, to walk in the broad road which leads to destruction.

There have been false teachers in all ages. There were some among the Jews of old. Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned the people against prophets, who said, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace," and "healed the wound of the daughter of God's people slightly," and "daubed the wall with untempered mortar." (Ez. 13.) By these comparisons we are taught that the false prophets encouraged people to remain in sin. False ministers do so now; they do not teach the necessity of a living faith, and of an entire change of heart; therefore their hearers are not led to wash in the fountain of Christ's blood, or to pray that they may be truly converted.

It is quite necessary to warn people against such teachers; for many listen to their words, and follow their pernicious ways. These ministers are compared to wolves, because they destroy the souls of God's people. They are described as wearing sheep's clothing, because they often speak in a religious tone, and use Scripture language. When Lord Cobham was tried in London, in the year 1413, these hypocritical sentences were written by the Papists in his letter of condemnation and death—"Following Christ's example in all that we might, who wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live, we took upon us to correct him. . . . Pitying him of fatherly compassion, and entirely desiring the health of his soul, we appointed him an adequate time of deliberation. Christ we take unto witness, that nothing else we seek in this our whole enterprise but his glory."

This language was sheep's clothing. Those who used it were inwardly ravening wolves. They sought to kill a pious nobleman, because he would not believe the errors which they taught. At last they obtained their heart's desire; for Lord Cobham was sentenced by the English parliament to be hung in chains and roasted over a slow fire!

Christ has told us *how* we are to detect false teachers when disguised in a fleece—by their fruits. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These heavenly qualities adorn every faithful minister, though in some they flourish more than in others. Love reigns in the heart of every true Christian, and shines forth in his actions. He may be known by his kindness to *all* the saints, by his patient behavior to his enemies, and by his unwearied efforts to save the souls of men. None but a converted person brings forth such fruits as these. There are many unconverted people who lead moral, respectable, and even benevolent lives, but their hearts do not overflow with this *love* that we have described; and as their apparently good actions do not proceed from the right motive, they are worthless in the sight of Him who searches the hearts. None but a good tree can bring forth good fruit. We are all bad trees by nature; but God can make us good trees by his Spirit.

How dreadful is the declaration—"Every tree which doesn't bring forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire!" Should not this terrible sentence lead us all anxiously to inquire, "Have I received a new nature? Have I become a good tree? Has the heavenly Husbandman found good fruit growing upon my branches?" The loving, the tender Savior would not have alarmed us, had there been no cause for alarm.

March 22

Matthew 7:21-23. He predicts the rejection of the false professor.

In this passage, Jesus gave a solemn warning to his own disciples, to those who professed to believe in him, and to those who called him "Lord, Lord." At the beginning of this sermon, he had declared, that except their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could not be saved. He had shown that the righteousness of the Pharisees was a mere outward form of religion, and he had warned his own followers against being satisfied with a mere form also. He declared that *many* would be lost through this sad mistake. "Many will say unto *me* in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?" and I will profess unto them, "I never knew you." In these words Jesus revealed *himself* as the *Judge* of men—even as the Son of God.

Now let us hear what our Judge says. He declares that none shall enter heaven, but those who do the will of his Father. Does this make us tremble? Surely we must feel (if we know ourselves at all) that we often sin. But, "doing the Father's will," does not mean *never* being overtaken by a fault; for Christ declared to his Father in his last prayer for his disciples before his crucifixion, (John 17,) that *they "had kept his word."* Yet we know that they had often fallen into sin, such as disputing which should be the greatest, desiring to resent injuries, and sending away poor suppliants.

But what is it to do the will of God? It is sincerely to seek to please him from LOVE to his name. None do this but those who have received the *Spirit of God*, those who are born again. Jesus did not explain this subject *fully* in *this* sermon; but he said enough to show that we must seek for grace from God in order to be saved. Did he not say, "Seek first the kingdom of God and *his righteousness?*" and also, "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you?" If we would do the will of God, we must seek for new hearts.

There is a passage in the epistles, which shows clearly that nothing short of the power of God working in our hearts can enable us to perform any action acceptable in his sight. (Heb. 13:20, 21.) "Now the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, (that great Shepherd of the sheep,) through

the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work *to do his will, working in you* that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen." These verses show us that the power of that God who raised Christ from the dead, must work in our hearts to enable us to do his will. Neither can we do it, but through faith in Christ's *blood*, which was shed for us according to his everlasting promise or covenant.

Do we dread the idea of meeting with a repulse at the last day? Now is the time to examine whether we have been born again; whether the blood of Christ has washed away our sins; whether the Spirit has been shed abroad in our hearts; and whether we are doing the will of God. It is possible to depart out of this world, imagining we are going to heaven, and after all be disappointed. Many will suffer the severest of all disappointments. Will any of the lost spirits weep as bitterly as those who thought, until the very last, that they were going to be admitted into the mansions of bliss? Jesus would save us from receiving this agonizing refusal. He warns us beforehand **not to be satisfied with a mere 'form of religion'**, but to seek for a new heart and a right spirit.

March 23

Matthew 7:24 to end. *The parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand.*

Christ ended his sermon on the mount by warnings against the danger of an empty profession of religion. He first gave the warning in plain language, saying, "Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Then he related a parable on the subject. It is the *first* of his parables recorded. It resembles his last parable in this point—both of them convey a **dreadful warning to false professors of religion**. In the parable of the talents an unprofitable servant is described, who is cast into outer darkness. (Matthew 25:30.) And in *this* parable a foolish builder is spoken of, who, we have reason to believe, was crushed beneath the ruins of his own house. Why did Jesus thus begin and end his series of parables with warnings against the same sin? Was it not that he knew **the great danger in which we stand, of being satisfied with a mere form of godliness?**

Nothing is said about the sort of house the wise man built upon the rock. It may have been a large, or a small one; a splendid house, or a shabby one, we know not; but it was a *safe* one. The foundation was good. The foundation is the unseen part of a house, and yet the most important. So it is in religion. The unseen part is the most important. What is the state of the heart? that is the most important question. Has it been humbled before God? Has it believed in Christ, and been sprinkled with his blood? Has it been sanctified by the Holy Spirit? These are the important points; yet these are the invisible points. None do the sayings of Christ but those who are truly converted; they alone love him; and

there is no obedience where there is no love.

The foolish man may have built a better house, in some respects, than the wise man did. The passers-by may have admired it more. He himself may have been much pleased with it. But it had one dominant fault, the foundation was bad. Instead of digging deep down in the solid rock, as the wise man did, he had been satisfied with a foundation in the sand. His house was *unsafe*; the higher it was, the greater would be its fall in the stormy day. As long as the weather continued fair, the house remained standing. As it was situated by the seaside, it was exposed to the fury of the waves as well as that of the winds. The tempest at length arose, and the house fell. How dreadful was the crash! how total the ruin! The waves would carry its beams and its planks to distant shores.

There is a day coming when the floods of great waters will try every building, and prove its strength. How strange it is that any should imagine themselves safe because they have *heard* the gospel! This is one of Satan's devices. If he cannot keep us from hearing the truth, he tries to persuade us to be satisfied with hearing; whereas, hearing should always be followed up by praying, and praying by doing. Yet, after all, it is not our own obedience that will save us, but the obedience of Him who bore the punishment of our sins upon the cross. If we believe in Jesus, we are built upon the rock of ages, and shall be able to endure the storm that will destroy the world, and all that is therein!

March 24

Luke 7:1-10. *The believing Centurion.*

How interesting every character must be whom the Savior approved! He, who will be the Judge of each of us, has shown us beforehand what sort of people he approves. This centurion was highly commended by the heart-searching Redeemer. Yet we should not have expected to find pity in a *centurion*. For, in the first place, he was a *soldier*, and a warlike life is a great hindrance to the soul. In the second place, he was a man of *rank*—and rank, we know, is a temptation to be proud. He was placed over a hundred soldiers, who were themselves men of some consideration; so that this centurion was perhaps equal in importance to a general in our armies. Thirdly, he was a *Gentile*, and therefore a heathen by birth. He had been sent by the Romans, who had conquered the Jews, to reside in Canaan. There he must have heard the Old Testament, and become acquainted with the true God, and believed the promise of a Savior. The report of our Lord's miracles had reached him, and had convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus, though a soldier, a man of rank, and a Gentile, he was a true believer.

Now let us examine the character of him who was commended so highly by the Lord.

Observe his **compassion**. He was deeply interested in his poor servant's illness, for this servant was *dear* unto him. True religion binds the hearts of masters and servants together, and makes them brethren, beloved in the Lord. (See Epistle to Philemon, ver. 16.)

Observe also his **love to the people of God**. He loved the *Jews*, because they were the peculiar people of God; and he did not love them in *word* only, but in *deed* and in truth, for he had built them a synagogue. Thus he had shown his love by his liberal actions.

Observe also his **humility**. Far from being puffed up with a conceit of his own merit, in having built a synagogue, he thought himself unworthy to come to the Savior, or to receive him beneath his roof. Matthew in his Gospel says the *centurion* came to Jesus; but, it is common to say people do things *themselves* when they cause *others* to do them. Luke gives a *longer* account of the circumstance, and mentions that some elders of the Jews were *sent* by the centurion. His respectful conduct was the more remarkable, because Jesus was poor and despised, but in the eyes of this honorable soldier, the lowly Nazarene was greater than the greatest of the sons of men. Being a *Gentile*, he thought he was less acceptable to Christ than the Jews, who were descended from the beloved Abraham, the friend of God. But in this he was mistaken, for Christ is no respecter of persons, and ever loved the children of Abraham in *spirit* above his children in the *flesh*. This Gentile *resembled* the Father of the Faithful, and was his son in *spirit*.

Lastly, let us consider his **faith**. It was in faith that he resembled Abraham. He had such faith, that he believed that if Jesus did but speak the word, all creatures must obey, even as his *own* soldiers and servants obeyed *him*. He thought that Christ's power was equal to that of God, who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Nor was he mistaken; for all things were created by Jesus Christ, and are upheld by the word of his power. This faith was exceedingly pleasing to the Savior. Jesus loves faith. He plants it in the heart as the root of every other grace. Behold how he rewarded the centurion's faith! he healed his servant.

What peace we would enjoy, if in all our difficulties we felt that Jesus was able to deliver us! When our dear friends are sick, let us believe that He need only speak the word, and they would be well. Whatever anxiety presses on our hearts, let us bring it all to him, spread it before him, and trust him to do what will be best for us. If we act thus, we shall experience such mercies as will overwhelm us with gratitude.

Jesus declared that he had never met with such great faith in *Israel*, as he had found in this *Gentile*. He then took occasion to declare a very delightful and a very dreadful truth. It is recorded by Matthew, (8:11, 12,) "*Many* shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the

kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing."

By the "children of the kingdom," Jesus meant the Jews. They *heard* the sayings of Christ, and *did* them not; but many in distant lands would hear them and do them.

In our days the gospel has been preached in the North and South, the East and West; and already some in every part have believed. Esquimaux, known among his nation as "the man the Savior took to himself," shall he not come from the *north* to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Africanus, once a ferocious chief, afterwards the missionary's faithful friend, shall he not come from the *south*? Abdool, the proud Mohammedan, grown as humble as a little child, shall he not come from the *East*? and though poor and despised like her Lord, shall not Sarah, the Indian widow—the patient, the forgiving Sarah, come from the *West* to join the blessed company of patriarchs and prophets? God grant that none of us may be thrust with unbelieving Jews into outer darkness.

March 25

Luke 7:11-17. *The raising of the widow's son.*

There are only *three* instances recorded of the Lord Jesus raising the dead, and in each instance was a case of aggravated sorrow.

The dead boy of Nain was the *only* son of a widow; he was the earthly *all* of his mother, the object of her fondest affections, and perhaps the support of her declining years.

If any of us have ever seen a widow who has sustained such a loss, what anguish of heart we have witnessed! How has she dwelt on the attractive qualities of the lost one; how has she lamented her own desolation, and said, in the bitterness of her soul, "Is there any sorrow like my sorrow?" No doubt we felt compassion for the bereaved parent, but not *such* as Jesus felt at the sight of the widow of Nain; for no heart was ever tender as the heart of the Redeemer.

What tenderness he showed in his manner of performing the miracle! He first addressed the sorrowful mother, saying, "Weep not." *We* would but mock the afflicted, if we were to say, "Weep not." We can only weep *with* those that weep. But Jesus could remove the cause of grief. Though himself a man of sorrows, he tasted the pure joy of comforting mourners. If the mother looked up, she beheld him through her tears approach the coffin. What a moment of expectation that was! We do not know whether the bearers had faith to believe that Jesus could raise the dead, but they stood still in his presence. Then the majestic command was heard, "I say unto you, Arise."

On what a scene that young man opened his eyes! There was his fond mother—but who was this wonderful person standing close beside him? He began to speak. By speaking he proved that he was really alive. What were his first words? We are not informed. Did he inquire who had restored him to life? He soon must have known, for he who had snatched him from the grasp of death, now delivered him into the arms of his mother. This sweet office the Lord would perform himself. It must have been a solace to his loving heart to behold the joyful meeting of the parent and the child.

But his chief reason for performing miracles was to confirm his word. By raising the widow's son, he showed that he could bestow life. He had declared, "All who are in the graves shall hear my voice, and shall come forth." Yet there will be a great difference between *that* resurrection, and *this* of the young man, because the dead will then be *changed*; whereas, this young man wore again his corruptible body. Jesus was the *first* who rose from the dead with a glorified body, no more to die.

Would we be partakers in the resurrection from the grave, we must *now* experience *another*—a resurrection from the death of trespasses and sins. This is the most wonderful of all; but Jesus can bestow it by his word. "The hour is coming, and *now* is," said the Lord of life, "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live." Yes, the hour *now* is when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live. The dead in trespasses and sins hear the voice of the Christ in his holy word; they believe, and *live*. As the apostle Paul said to the Ephesians, "You has he quickened, (or made alive,) who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. 2:1.) These very words that Jesus spoke to the widow's son, "Young man, I say unto you, Arise," have aroused some dead in *sins*, and caused them to live to God.

March 26

Luke 7:18-23. *The visit of John the Baptist's disciples.*

We know that John at this time was shut up in prison. While there he was visited by his disciples. Though they had often been directed to look to Jesus as the Savior of the world, it appears they now doubted whether he was the true Messiah so long expected. They did well to come to their teacher to express their doubts. It is always well to confide such thoughts to those who are able to help us, for by hiding them in our own bosoms, we may often occasion ourselves much uneasiness, and expose ourselves to great danger. It would, indeed, be very wrong to express our doubts to ignorant, or unbelieving people, but it is wise to open our minds to experienced Christians.

The disciples of John must have heard reports of the miracles which Jesus did,

but they did not believe these reports. Probably they were prejudiced against the Lord on account of his manner of life, which was very unlike that of John; for Jesus freely mixed with sinners, and ate and drank with them, while John had always led a solitary life, and had lived upon the plainest food. John took an excellent method to convince his unbelieving disciples. He sent them to Jesus.

We often find that the Lord refused to perform miracles to convince unbelievers. When the Pharisees asked him for a sign, he said they would have none but that of the prophet Jonah, (the sign of the resurrection.) But he did *not* refuse to perform miracles to convince these inquirers. What was the reason of this difference? No doubt he knew that they were *desirous* to believe, and he always treats those with great compassion who are *anxious* to know the truth.

If any doubt whether the Gospel is from heaven, let them go and witness its effects. Behold John Newton, the slave-dealer, transformed into a tender-hearted man, who delights in freeing the slaves of Satan. Behold thousands of blind idolaters throwing away their idols and abandoning their vicious practices. But time would fail us even to glance at the wonders the Gospel has wrought among all nations, from the days of Paul until now.

Yet still it is necessary to hearken to our Savior's warning—"Blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in me." Blessed is he whoever shall believe in me in spite of all he sees in me to hinder his believing. By these words Jesus taught John's disciples, that notwithstanding his miracles, many would refuse to believe in him.

There are still many temptations not to believe in Jesus. The world does not believe in him—this is one temptation; there are so many hypocrites and inconsistent Christians—this is another temptation; the people of God are generally poor, lowly, and unlearned—this is another stumbling-block; and the doctrine of salvation by faith is unpleasant to proud and earthly hearts—this is the greatest stumbling-block of all. But those who believe, notwithstanding all these hindrances, shall receive this blessing. "Blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended by me."

We have reason to hope that John's disciples did believe in Jesus, because they appear to have been men of a right spirit. When they returned, according to the Savior's command, to their imprisoned master, and related the wonders they had seen, how great must have been the joy of that faithful man! His gloomy prison must have been enlightened by the tidings of his Savior's glory. Nothing cheers the servants of God so much as to hear of the triumphs of their Lord. They rejoice when they read of the success of missionaries in far distant lands, and they look forward to the day when every knee shall bow to the eternal Son of God. Are *our* hearts interested in these great and glorious subjects? are they wrapped up in the insignificant occurrences of the passing hour? We all have selfish hearts by nature; but God can enlarge them by his grace, and make them

delight in those events which are the joy of saints and angels.

March 27

Matthew 11:7-17. *Jesus commends John the Baptist.*

God has said, "those who honor me I will honor."—(1 Sam. 2:30.) John the Baptist honored Christ much in his preaching, and now we hear how greatly Christ honored him. The Lord, who knows all men, declared that no prophet greater than John had ever appeared. Elijah, who raised the widow's son, was not greater; for though John had performed no miracle, he knew more of Christ than any who had come before him.

Jesus reminded the people of the time when John preached in the wilderness, and asked them why they had gone there. Was it to see one of the *reeds*, shaken by the wind? No! they had not gone to see a *common* sight, but to see an *extraordinary* sight. Was it a magnificent *worldly* sight that they had gone into the wilderness to see? No! if they had desired to behold splendor and magnificence they would not have gone into the *wilderness* to search for it. It is kings in their palaces who are arrayed in gorgeous dazzling garments; whereas John the Baptist was only clothed in skins, and a leather belt; there was nothing to please the eye in his appearance. Why then had they gone into the wilderness? To hear a *prophet*. Jesus reminded the people of this, to show them how much spiritual good they *ought* to have gained from their visits to the wilderness. But many had derived no benefit from these visits; if they had, they would have received Christ as the Son of God, for John had preached concerning him.

Jesus then declared that the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater even than John. The Lord had come to establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth. He had come to shed his blood for the sins of men. Those who believe in the crucified Savior are greater in knowledge than John the Baptist; for they know the way of salvation more fully than he did. We live in the latter days, and God has spoken to us by his Son, and by his apostles, the least of whom was a greater prophet than John. How shall we escape if we neglect so *great* salvation?

What did Jesus mean by the expression, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force?" By the *violent*, we believe, He meant those worldly people who persecute his servants. As John had suffered imprisonment, and would also suffer death, for preaching the truth, so from his days would all the faithful servants of the Lord be subjected to much suffering for their Master's sake. Violent men would endeavor to rob and destroy by force the kingdom of heaven.

Then the Lord made a declaration that must have surprised many of those who heard him. He said that John was the Elijah spoken of by Malachi in the last

chapter of his prophecy. (Mal. 4:5.) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord." John was not Elijah himself, but he had come in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah, being fervent in spirit and great in power, turning sinners to the Lord. Yet Jesus knew that many would not believe what he was now declaring, for he said, "*If you will receive it, this is Elijah that was for to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear.*"

We see from this passage, that Jesus knows what advantages we have enjoyed, and what use we have made of them. Have we heard faithful and impressive preachers? What effect have their sermons had upon our hearts? Have we been persuaded to strive earnestly to enter the kingdom of heaven? **If we merely float down the stream, we shall at length be plunged into an abyss of misery.** The tide is against us, and the wind is contrary. We must be anxious and earnest. The prayer of Jacob suits every perishing sinner, "I will not let you go, except you bless me."

March 28

Luke 7:29-35. *Jesus reproveth the Jews for their perverseness.*

We now refer to Luke's account of our Savior's discourse about John the Baptist, because it contains some particulars omitted by Matthew.

The Lord Jesus declared that the people, and even the publicans, believed John the Baptist's preaching, while the Pharisees despised it. The publicans were great sinners, most of them being notoriously dishonest in the collection of taxes. When John declared to them that their sins were great, and deserved punishment, they justified God, that is, they acknowledged that God's sentence was *just*, and they gladly received baptism as a sign of their need of being cleansed from their iniquities. But when John delivered the same truths to the Pharisees, telling them they were the children of the devil, and a generation of vipers, they were offended; they rejected the counsel of God *against* themselves, and did not desire to be baptized, because they thought they were already clean in heart and in life. Thus it often is *now*. Some who have committed open gross sins are brought to repentance; while others, who have led regular, and apparently religious lives, will not believe that on account of the secret sins of their *hearts*, they ought to humble themselves before God.

The Pharisees treated the Lord Jesus in the same way that they had treated John—with contempt. They had found fault with John, because he led so solitary and so strict a life, being clad in skins, feeding on locusts and honey, and refusing to taste wine or strong drink, therefore they had said that he was possessed with the devil. But they could not find the same fault with Jesus; for he led quite an opposite life, eating and drinking like men in general, and mingling with the vilest sinners, that he might win their souls to God. Yet the Pharisees

were not better pleased with him than with John, and profanely called him a glutton, and a wine bibber, and a friend of sinners. But what was the reason that both John and the Lord Jesus were assaulted by the Pharisees' reproaches, when they were so different from each other in their manner of life? The reason was, that they both had declared the same unwelcome truths; they both had preached the necessity of repentance and faith.

Jesus related a short parable to describe the Pharisees' conduct. It was common for children in the market-place to play at rejoicing and at mourning. One party of children imitated the glad songs of the Jews at their marriages, and on other joyful occasions, (such as the return of a long-lost son,) while another party were expected to dance to the sound of their music. But sometimes sullen and wayward children would not join in the amusement. Then the other party would good-naturedly change the play and imitate the mournful music of funerals, (such as that made by the minstrels when Jairus' daughter lay dead,) expecting their companions to use sorrowful gestures and to appear to weep; but the same spoiled children would object to this play also. Thus the Pharisees liked neither the strict manners of John the Baptist, nor the condescending behavior of the Lord. This was a proof that they hated their words of wisdom, for Jesus declared, "Wisdom is justified by all her children." The children of wisdom, (or of God,) acknowledge his heavenly wisdom by whomsoever declared. If the Pharisees had been the children of God, they would have justified God both when John preached, and when the Lord himself preached.

People who hate the Gospel continue to excuse themselves for not attending to it, by accusing those who preach it of faults in their manner, or of errors in their life. These accusations proceed from enmity to the Gospel, and will not be received by God as excuses for neglecting it. If men could find fault with the Savior's conduct, how impossible it is for a true Christian to escape censure, especially as he is liable to commit *real* errors! But O how great is the guilt of those who thus oppose the servants of God! They are enemies to their own souls.

God tries every means to turn sinners to himself; in his holy word, sometimes using tender entreaties, and sometimes denouncing dreadful warnings—in his providence sometimes heaping mercies on our heads, and sometimes executing judgment. Should every means fail to melt, or to subdue our hearts, well may his wrath wax hot against us! Let us pray for an obedient and docile spirit, ready to listen to the word of the Lord, whether He speaks in thunder, or in a small still voice.

March 29

Matthew 11:20-24. *Christ upbraids three cities for their impenitence.*

We find from this passage that the preaching of the Lord Jesus produced very little effect upon men's hearts. In order that people be converted, it is necessary, not only that the *preaching* be faithful, but that the *hearts* of the hearers be prepared—for otherwise the tongues of holy men, or of angels, or even of the Son of God, may speak in vain.

The cities in which our Savior most frequently preached were Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum. We are inclined to exclaim, "Blessed cities!" But Jesus says, "Woe unto you, Chorazin!" The preaching of the Son of God was not a blessing to that city, but a curse. And now the very place where it stood cannot be ascertained. Travelers may still visit Bethlehem and Nazareth, Jericho and Sychar, and many other ancient cities; but if they inquire for Capernaum, and Chorazin, and Bethsaida, they will get no certain answer.

There is a very wonderful truth contained in the words of Christ, just read by us. Jesus declared that Tyre and Sidon, two heathen cities, would have repented, if they had seen the miracles he had performed in Israel; and that Sodom, that most wicked city, would also have repented, and been spared the "vengeance of eternal fire." We see therefore that Jesus not only knows all that *does* happen, and all that *will* happen; but that he also knows all that *would* have happened, in every possible case. He knows how each heathen city would have received his word, had she heard it. He does not explain to us his reasons for not giving that light to Tyre and Sidon which he bestowed on the cities of Israel. He gives an account of none of his matters. The Judge of all the earth will do right, and none may dare to say, or even to *think*, "What are you doing?" At the last day his justice in his dealings with men will be seen and acknowledged by the assembled universe. The degree of every person's punishment will be exactly proportioned to his guilt; and that guilt will be measured by his advantages, and by the use he made of them. And can we hear this without reflecting upon our own case? How great are the privileges we enjoy!

There have been heathens, who, as soon as they were told of the love of Jesus in dying for their sins, began to repent. A Hindoo set out on a pilgrimage to Juggernaut, carrying with him a few tracts which he had not read. Being detained on the way by the illness of his wife, he had the opportunity of reading them attentively. Did he proceed to Juggernaut? No! he set out on a better pilgrimage. Desiring to persuade his countrymen to turn to the Lord, he often read aloud to little assemblies in the open air. While thus engaged, a poor native passed by, stopped to listen, was struck by what he heard, asked a few important questions, and immediately determined to give himself to Him who had bought him with his blood. (Report of the Religious Tract Society for 1845, p. 58.)

Are not those Hindoos a reproach to any who, having heard many sermons, and read many chapters, and received much instruction, have not repented yet?

Surely if we repent not, we shall be thrust down to the *lowest* hell; far, far below the wickedest of the heathen!

But Jesus will himself bestow *repentance* on all who seek this precious grace. "Him has God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins," (Acts. 5:31.)

March 30

Matthew 11:25 to end. Christ offers a thanksgiving to his Father, and invites the heavy laden to come to Him.

We have now read the end of our Savior's discourse to the people, after John the Baptist's messengers had departed. The *beginning* of the discourse contains warnings and reproofs, but the *end* is filled with thanksgivings, invitations, and entreaties. Jesus intermingled prayer to his Father with his addresses to the people. What a privilege we enjoy in being permitted to know what he said to his Father! He spoke aloud that men might be edified; for on one occasion he declared, when engaged in prayer, "because of the people who stand by, I said it," (John 11:42.)

Often our blessed Lord offered up prayer accompanied by tears, (Heb. 5:7;) but on this occasion heavenly joy must have enlightened his countenance, for Luke informs us that "he rejoiced in spirit," (Luke 10:21.) And what was the cause of his joy? It was, that God had revealed these things to babes, *though* he had hid them from the wise and prudent. *What* things? Things respecting himself; the things about which John the Baptist's disciples had inquired—"Are you he who shall come, or look we for another?" (ver. 3.)

These things many babes knew. By *babes* ignorant people are meant, those who *feel* their ignorance, and desire to be taught of God. To such babes (whether learned or not in *worldly* things) God reveals his Son, while he leaves the wise and prudent in *their own sight* to blindness and darkness. Such were the Pharisees. Though really blind and dark, they thought they knew the way of salvation; for Satan had blinded their minds, as it is written in 2 Cor. 4:3, 4—"The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should shine into them."

Let us pray to God to give us the spirit of a *babe*, a humble, teachable spirit, and then Christ will reveal to us that heavenly knowledge which can save our souls. It seemed good in the Father's sight that babes should be instructed. We need not, therefore, fear a repulse from our heavenly Father, if we come confessing our ignorance and desiring to be taught. And who is the Teacher that He has appointed? It is the meek and lowly Jesus. Hear him say, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Who would not delight in receiving instruction from such gracious lips? How sweetly he encourages sinners to approach!—"Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And does

not his invitation include every child of man? Every sinner is weary and heavy laden. Penitent sinners mourn for the *guilt* of sin; but those who are not penitent feel the misery of its *bondage*. They may not know what it is that interrupts their happiness; they may think it is the circumstances in which they are placed; but it is the sin that dwells in them, and holds them in captivity. Jesus alone can free the soul from the chain of its sins; he alone can bestow rest. Those who believe in him do enter into rest; they can say of their Shepherd, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters."

How happy are they who early choose the Lord for their friend and master! They will find his yoke easy, and his burden light; they will find that, instead of binding burdens upon them, he himself bears their burdens. Ask those who have been *long* engaged in this service, whether they have not found his yoke easy and his burden light. They will tell you that in the brightest days of heedless youth, they never tasted that peace which they have found in the darkest nights of pious old age.

March 31

Luke 7:36 to end. *The penitent weeping at the feet of Jesus.*

Two opposite characters are described in this interesting history; Simon the Pharisee and the weeping sinner!

Simon was probably respected by his neighbors, and accounted a religious man, but he was *not* accepted in the sight of Jesus. The woman had been a gross and open sinner, yet she was accepted by her Savior. Now what was the reason of this difference? Does Jesus love sin? God forbid!

The reason of the difference was, that Simon did *not* love Jesus, and the poor woman did love Him. The Pharisee showed his lack of love by neglecting to pay him the attention usually shown in that country to guests. He neither gave him water to wash his feet, nor ointment to anoint his person, nor did he bestow the customary salutation. The woman showed her love to Jesus by coming into the house where he was, notwithstanding the scoffs and frowns of the master and his friends; by standing at his feet washing them with her tears, kissing them with respectful affection, and anointing them with precious ointment. The customs of that country rendered it easy for the poor penitent to enter the house. Jesus was reposing, according to the eastern fashion, upon a sofa, and his feet were in such a position that the woman, while she stood behind him, could weep over them and anoint them.

Let us now ask *why* the woman loved Jesus so much, and the Pharisee loved him so *little*, or rather not at all? Jesus himself explained the reason in his parable. He had forgiven the woman a mighty debt. She knew that he had

forgiven it, and therefore she loved him; for this is the meaning of the 47th verse. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, (not *because* she loved much, but) therefore she loved much. Jesus *first* forgave her, and *then* she loved Him.

Jesus does not say that the Pharisee's debt was *really* small. He related this parable to show his host that if he *thought* his debt small, he could not love him much, even if he forgave him his debt. Do we wish to know whether we love Jesus much? Let us ask ourselves what we think of our *debt*. Do we think it small or large? Do we think that our sins are many or few?

By nature we all think that our debt is small. Yes, even murderers think that their sins are not so great as they appear, and that they are excusable on account of their many temptations. Thus we all excuse ourselves in our own sight, and think it an easy thing for God to forgive us such little debts. While we remain in this state of mind, we cannot love Jesus much. In fact, we cannot love him *at all*, and we cannot be accepted in his sight. But if Jesus, by his Spirit, touches our hearts, then we perceive that our sins are very great, and we cry to Him, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is *great*." It is not the *acts* of sin that we chiefly lament, but the *secret* sins of our hearts. These, we feel, are set in the light of God's countenance, and cannot be forgiven without the shedding of the Savior's blood. People often remain a long while in great distress on account of their sins; but when they can believe that there is forgiveness with God, and that he has washed them from their sins, they are filled with gratitude; then they love much, because Jesus has forgiven much.

Never do we lament our sins so much, as when we think of our Savior's infinite love. When is it we regret most our offences against an *earthly* friend? Is it not when we find that while we have been *neglecting* him, he has been *laboring* for our good; that when we have been *suspecting* him, he has been *pleading* for us? This is the grief that the true penitent feels. This was the grief that caused the woman to shed such abundant tears upon the feet of Jesus.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).