Matthew - Commentaries by James Lampden Harris

Believe and Live, Two Roads, The: Matthew 7:13-14

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Matthew 7:13-14

“What does this mean?” It is a diagram on the two roads—the narrow and the broad—on one of which each one of us is most surely traveling; and let me at once ask you to turn to Matt. 7:13 and 14, and read it carefully, as in the presence of God. We all know what it is to walk along a road to some place we wish to reach, and how important it is to take the right turn. Imagine a man wishing to reach some town, and yet not caring to know whether he has taken the proper road to it. We meet him, and in answer to some inquiry: “Whither away, friend?” he will perhaps name the town he wishes to gain. “But I am not quite sure that you are on the right road for it.” “Ah, well,” he replies, “I hope for the best; I daresay I shall reach it at last.” What should we think of a man speaking in this way? Yet many seem to be quite as careless as to whether they have Scriptural evidence that they are on the right road for Heaven. Surely it is time to look into these matters.

Kindly feel the sheet of paper on which this is printed. You will find that it has two sides, and obviously only two. In like manner there are exactly two classes of people in this world—those on the broad road, and those on the narrow road. “But is there no third road for those who are not openly wicked, and who really seem rather better than their neighbors?” I assure you that in the Bible, which is the travelers’ authentic guide-book, I can find no trace of any such third distinct road. Yes, a man must be serving either Christ or the devil. How important then clearly to find out, Bible in hand, on which road you are traveling. I charge you to look this matter in the face now, before it is too late.

Suppose a tradesman thinks his affairs are not quite straight. If he is an honest, straightforward man, his ledgers will be brought down, and he will spend a long evening in looking well into the matter, feeling that it is best to know the worst at once. I call this only common sense. But how are you acting as to Eternity—Eternity, that four-syllabled word, meaning so much? When I was a boy I used to be set profit and loss sums to work out. Have you ever seriously thought of that great profit and loss question: “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (See Mark 8:34 to end.) May the Lord God, then, by His Holy Spirit, search your heart, and show you plainly on which road you are traveling.

Take another look at the diagram. I remember taking a chart of the two roads to the house of a man in whom I was much interested. He seemed, up to that time, not to have been awakened to a sense of danger for his immortal soul, but was living in comparative carelessness. On the evening in question he was to be alone for more than an hour, in the absence of his wife. Spreading the chart out on the table, I begged him to study it carefully, and then left him to himself and to God. The Holy Spirit brought the subject home to him; and he afterward confessed that for several days he could hardly think of anything but the two roads, even at his daily work. The more he thought of it, the more settled he was that he was himself still on the broad road. I am glad to be able to add that within a week or ten days he was rejoicing in Christ as his Savior, and has since brought forth fruits meet for repentance.

The gate at the entrance to the narrow road is a strait one, but, thanks be to God, it stands open, and admittance is free. One fact, however, must be allowed: it is humbling to our natural hearts to go in at this strait gate, or even to acknowledge our need of entering in by it. Hence the scandal of the Cross (Gal. 5:11). We would rather choose a gateway and road of our own, one which would not compromise our pride. The great captain, Naaman, considered the prescribed remedy far too simple and humbling; and the hearts of many are like his. If men were bidden to do some great thing in order to obtain Salvation, most would set about their task at once. But in His great love God offers Eternal Life as a free gift through Christ Jesus; for Christ is Himself the door by which we may freely enter the narrow road. He invites us to enter, and, with our sins forgiven us for His Name’s sake (1 John 2:12), to walk on in fellowship with Him, enjoying that peace which the world cannot give.

This peace shall be enjoyed by true-hearted pilgrims, even though

Their course is very briefly sketched out in Rom. 5:1 and 2. At the very entrance they get peace about the past; all along their journey grace for the present; and by faith they see at the end of their journey, perhaps not far off, glory for the future. True happiness can only be found in this narrow road. How sad, then, the thought that there is a notice in our authentic guidebook, “Few there be that find it.” Are you one of these happy few?

A word or two as to the broad road, though it is a sorrowful theme. The road seems an attractive one. I say “seems,” for the world’s pleasures are very fleeting and disappointing, as many find out. Besides, some who travel on it know the misery of being bound by some secret begetting sin, which makes their very life wretched. Possibly you who read this paper are inwardly convicted of this. At any rate, if you nave not yet entered by the strait gate, I feel sure you are not at rest unless enjoying some false peace. How many are secretly restless when the church bell is tolling, or a sudden death has occurred in the street in which they live. Why is this? Answer: Because their conscience is uneasy.

There are many travelers on the broad road. In fact, it is the popular one, if we are to believe our guide-book. The number, however, is no proof of safety. If a railway train is hurled over an embankment, the more passengers it contains the worse the accident; but during the journey the engine-driver is clearly no safer because many others are in the same position as himself.

Be sure, then, not to trust to the popularity that the broad road has always acquired, but remember that some of the most eminent of travelers on the narrow road have been everywhere spoken against, as those that have turned the world upside down. They were often treated as vain babblers, and deemed beside themselves.

Now, what can I mean by “the clean footpath” on the left? Follow me in thought out on to the road leading to some large town. Owing to heavy rains yesterday the road is very muddy. The people are splashed and dirty that are walking along it. But I see some at the side there who seem to walk on very comfortably. They do not seem splashed and dirty. How can this be? Because they are on a clean footpath: but still I notice they are traveling in the same direction as those toiling along in the mud. Forgive the homeliness of my illustration. I verily believe many are walking along what Bunyan calls the clean footpath to hell. At a distance this footpath might be mistaken for the narrow road. But no, it is only a part of the broad road, and leads in the same direction. Who travel along it? Those who have only their own righteousness to trust to, and who rely upon their own morality for Salvation, instead of on Christ alone. The guide-book speaks of some who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, and again of others who have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. In all affectionate earnestness be it said: “Beware of mere morality without Christ.” Though we all value morality, yet it cannot of itself save a man, but is the sign of the clean footpath. Salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast; but when we have entered the narrow road, then indeed we are called upon to “do all such good works as God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Confer Titus 3:8.) See, then, that you are not found walking along this clean footpath, for after all it is but part of the broad road.

If you are not already happy “in Christ,” I would once more entreat you to “enter in at the strait gate,” lest a terrible day come to you “when once the Master of the house hath risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to say, Lord, Lord, open unto us.” But it will then be too late. Today it is not too late. Today, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Ask yourself solemnly again, before putting down this paper, “Which road am I on?” always remembering that there is NO MIDDLE PATH.

P. R.

Christian Witness Papers, Caesar and God

There are many parts of our Lord's ministry greatly neglected, because they do not immediately touch the question of individual salvation. And yet these are the parts which often are found happily to settle those questions, which human wisdom, although always trying, is never able to solve. Among these questions, that of the source of power is one very much debated, and not likely to be settled by the interested disputations of man's will. Man knows what power is in the hands of his fellows, and therefore he seeks to put such limits to it as may hinder its abuse with regard to his own interests. So that really power becomes a mere conventional arrangement; men agreeing how much they will give up of their own will for the sake of their own convenience. The idea of there being such an entity as power, is hardly practically allowed. If it be allowed that irresponsible power must exist somewhere to meet man's own convenience, the question will then arise, is this in each individual, or in one only? If men do not allow that power belongeth to God, they are necessarily driven to the alternative that man's will is irresponsible. And this really is becoming the question of the day.

It would be deeply interesting as well as profitable, to trace the scriptural history of power. It is, I think, very simply as well as pointedly detailed to us; and the subject is one of deep practical importance to the steadfastness as well as godliness of the walk of the saints. There are three particulars, which, for the sake of clearness, might be noticed.

First, that the scriptures most distinctly recognize power as alone belonging to God.

Secondly, that God has delegated power directly from Himself to some individuals in the world, to be held responsibly to Him.

Thirdly, that there is power directly from God in the Church, involving also responsibility to Himself.

1. -A few short statements from scripture will be sufficient on the first point. "God hath spoken once; twice also have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Now in this statement, power is attributed to God, -irresponsible power, guided in its exercise only according to His will. "He giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job 33:13). "He doeth whatsoever pleaseth him, both in heaven and earth." Power in God necessarily implies supreme will; if there be not a supreme will, there cannot be absolute power, so that the two become necessarily connected together. He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Here we have another necessary adjunct of supreme irresponsible power, -counsel to direct it aright. "Wisdom and might are his" (Dan. 2:20). And when it comes to actual manifestation, it is Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

2. -Power thus being in God alone, He has been pleased to delegate it; but in doing so, He has held those to whom He delegated it, responsible to take His will in the exercise of it for their guide, and this alone would be their wisdom. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Or as we see exhibited in Jesus; perfect wisdom in man by acquiescence in the supreme will of God. -"Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (cp. John 7:17, Isa. 1). The possession of power with subjection of will, is the universal order of God, -we see it in the case of angels. -"Bless the Lord ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his that do his pleasure." In God's dealings with man, the same principle has been manifested. Let us make man in our image, and our likeness, and let them have dominion. The dominion was ample, but ample as it was, limited by the will of God. His will was to be supreme over the governor he had appointed over the earth. The result we know. Man would have supreme will as well as ample dominion. He would rule in his own name "Ye shall be as Gods," -this was the temptation; and in seeking to be so, he lost the place of happy subjection and ample lordship. An antagonist will to that of God's had come in, and the earth was speedily corrupted by means of it. Oh, that men knew what real bondage and dishonor their boasted freedom of will is, -free from righteousness to be the servants of sin.

Moses had ample power delegated to him of God, so that he was as "a god to Pharaoh." And he was faithful to God in the use of it, excepting in a single instance, -he would exercise the power in his own name and not the name of God, and for this he brought on himself the wrath of God (Num. 20:10-12).

God raised up David, and gave him mighty power, and his whole soul seemed to expand in ascribing his power to the source from whence it came, as may be gathered from many places in the Psalms, but is summed up in one sentence in the Chronicles. -"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is

power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." But David failed in owning this responsibility in the matter of numbering the people, and brought the wrath of God on himself and them. In these several instances we find power as a blessing entrusted by God to man; and when used in God's name, it is always a blessing. But man has not so used it, but for his own selfish ends; and thus power in the hands of men, has become an object of distrust and jealousy. Men have tried to limit it by restrictions of their own; but power in blessing will never be known until it is limited in its exercise, not by the will of man, but by the will of God. Men feel the necessity of power somewhere; and it is God's purpose yet to introduce His own power in full unhindered blessing, even in this earth, which has been the scene of the exercise of power in so many wrongful ways. David failed in using God's power unto God's glory and man's blessing, but David's testimony in his last words is not to fail. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the rock of Israel spake to me, he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." David knew it would not be so with his house, God would take away his power from it, and transfer it elsewhere, yet still the covenanted purpose of God would stand sure; and power limited in him that exercised it by the fear of the Lord, and acknowledged by those over whom it was exercised as of God, should be known in this earth.

To one exercised only about individual salvation, this question of power would not at all appear to be interesting; but to one desirous of being intelligent in all the thoughts of God, it will not only appear a question of deep interest, but of all importance. For various as have been the abuses of power in the world, its final apostasy is that which marks that great future corruption, the greatest that ever has been witnessed under heaven. It is difficult indeed to read the Revelation without having this solemnly pressed on the mind. However we may interpret the book, such passages as these -receive power as kings one hour with the beast -these shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings" -or again, "and I saw the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army" -clearly mark the collision of power in man, with the immediate power of God himself. Are our minds really prepared for such an awful issue as this? Now if to this be added the warnings of the Spirit by the Apostles to the saints, and the direct prophetic testimony through them unto the apostasy of power, surely it will become us to give this subject more heed, lest in any wise we be led away by the spirit of lawlessness, now so remarkably working. The Spirit saw clearly the advantage which man's will would take of God's long-suffering. Contempt cast upon the riches of God's goodness, would only lead to a more palpable manifestation of will in man. Even in the very Church this would be the great danger. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." Yea, the distinguishing blessings of the Church which were common to all, the least as well as the greatest, might be abused, so as to leave an opening for man's will to come in, and to seek to level distinctions which God had sanctioned (1 Tim. 6:1-5). But when we read such plain words as "even denying the Lord that bought them"—"but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities (2 Peter 2:1-10)" "Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities (Jude 8)" -surely we must be prepared to find that the abuse of God's grace ends in the unrestrainedness of man's will. And this worst form of corruption arises from the bosom of the Church. It is for this reason that I believe the bringing the conscience of the Church into exercise, as to the rights of Caesar and the rights of God, would be very profitable at the present time.

We have now to consider the source of the present power in the world, for its order and government. Such power was acknowledged by Jesus to be in the hands of Caesar, when Jesus was on earth, and it was acknowledged to be of God. How far Caesar might have acknowledged it of God is not the question; but the place that Jesus held, led him to the acknowledgment of God in all his ordinances.

The question of the Pharisees was framed with a subtlety which the adversary well knows to use, when he would vitiate any holy principle of God's truth. And it is because we overlook Christ as the wisdom of God moving through the varied circumstances of man, and meeting the many questions as they met him in his way, that we witness many a saint of God unwillingly surrendering some weighty principle. Satan knows that the wisdom of man cannot guide safely through this dilemma; it is the spiritual mind and obedient heart which alone can do this. -"Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" But here, as on other occasions, the wise were taken in their own craftiness. The answer of the wisdom of God always goes beyond the expectation of the inquirers. He brings out the question as it really is before him. There is not a thought in our hearts but God knows it altogether; and the answer to it will be found according to the comprehensiveness of his own wisdom, and not according to the narrowness of ours. This is our wisdom ever to bring in God, whereas the wisdom of the world is to exclude God. In their minds the question was between Caesar's power and their own will. They would use Jesus against Caesar, or Caesar against Jesus, if they could only have their own wills. But subjection of will was that which Jesus came to teach, and which He so fully exhibited. There were Caesar's rights and God's rights, and both were to be respected without being confounded. Submission, implicit submission, to all the power of Caesar, limited by implicit submission to the power of God; and they were responsible for defining the limit. And here again we see the wisdom of God, in throwing the inquirers on their own responsibility. Power, wherever it is, should lead to immediate recognition of God, both in the one who exercises it and the one who submits to it; and the failure of this recognition in the one, does not relieve the other from his responsibility. The tribute money showed that Caesar had a godly claim to their subjection, and the presence of Jesus himself was at that time God's special test of submission to himself. "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him. " But they were hypocrites, -they owned God neither in Cesar nor in Jesus. And however hardened their hearts might have been, their consciences were stricken by his answer. "When they heard, they marveled, and left him and went their way. "

But not only in his doctrine, but likewise in his conduct, we find Jesus recognizing the power of Caesar as of God. When He stood before Pilate, He said to him, "thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." Pilate knew not the source of his power: he had said, "knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee. " But Jesus could not own power in man, except from God; and Israel too should have known power only from God, therefore their sin was greater than even that of Pilate. It was their will which was at work to destroy Jesus. Pilate who had the power, was willing to let Him go; but their voices prevailed, and 'he delivered Jesus to their will." Pilate knew not the fear of the Lord as the limit to his power, but his power was guided by popular opinion, -"the voices of them, and of the chief priests prevailed"; and the result was, the crucifying the Lord of glory.

But in no way can we more clearly see the power of God in the world, or the rights of Caesar, and the limit set by God to the power so entrusted there, than by going back to its original grant. The greatest sin that Israel (up to that moment of its history) had committed, was to ask for a king as the nations had, when the Lord was their King. He was their immediate King, Lawgiver, and Judge, and they rejected him, to have one more according to their heart (1 Sam. 7). The Lord was pleased to show them what choosing a king for themselves would lead to: nevertheless grace came in, and the Lord raised up one after his own heart, in the person of David; but the fear of the Lord in the kings of

Judah and Israel soon gave place to expediency; and God who had given them a king in his anger, took him away in his wrath (Hos. 13:11). Israel was left without a king, and God now publicly on Israel's degradation, delegated most ample power to Nebuchadnezzar.

The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th chapters of Daniel, may be considered as the moral history of the power thus delegated -that is God's judgment as to the character of the exercise of the power, and its end in judgment. It is in fact man's thoughts and God's thoughts respecting power. In the dream which Nebuchadnezzar had, his thoughts were what should come to pass hereafter (Dan. 2:29), and this he is shown in the vision; the destruction of all the power and glory which he saw, -to be succeeded by a power and glory which should never be destroyed. But the point to notice in the second chapter, is the distinct announcement by God, through Daniel, of the grant of power to Nebuchadnezzar; to be continued, whatever their fortunes might be through four successive monarchies, and not to be withdrawn by God or superseded, except by a kingdom which God would set up never to be destroyed: set up on the ruin and downfall of all other power,—"it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." In all the vicissitudes of the world, from Nebuchadnezzar to the present hour, this grant of power still continues, and has never been canceled. Jesus acknowledged it in Caesar, and in Caesar's officer. And it is a direction given to the Church, so long as it is militant here -"to submit to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." That is the important word -there is no power but of God: the power may think otherwise and forget his responsibility, but that does not relieve the saint from his responsibility of owning God in the very power which may disown God altogether. It becomes therefore a matter of conscience, for God is in question,—"Ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." There may be obedience through fear of the consequences of disobedience from the power himself, but the subjection of the saints is on a far higher principle, it is unto God in the power. The moment God appears, he has to do with the conscience: this prerogative he has reserved to himself, and this as we shall see will set the only limit to unhesitating obedience to the power.

The grant to Nebuchadnezzar was large indeed. -"Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, and power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all." This grant laid Nebuchadnezzar under the responsibility of acknowledging God in the exercise of his power, -this was the lesson he had to learn, and which he eventually was taught under much humbling discipline. And it laid likewise the responsibility on all, to acknowledge the power of God in Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel knew the great secret, that power belongeth unto God. "Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." He now knew the power of God in Nebuchadnezzar, and was therefore placed where the maintenance of a good conscience, would be in rendering to Nebuchadnezzar the things of Nebuchadnezzar, and to God the things of God; in exercising himself to keep a conscience void of offense both toward God and toward men.

In the 3rd chapter of Daniel, we find Nebuchadnezzar forgetting his responsibility to God; and as necessarily must be the case, assuming irresponsible power and supreme will to himself. Here then we have the general statement as to the working of God's power in man's hands. Nebuchadnezzar in forgetfulness of the history of the image he had seen in the vision, as well as his responsibility to God, sets up an image of gold in the plain of Dura, and commanded all people, nations, and languages, which God had given into his hand, to worship this golden image. At the instance of Daniel, the king had set Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon. They were men set under authority having others under them, being themselves under Nebuchadnezzar; but this did not in any way affect their direct responsibility to God. Nebuchadnezzar must have the conscience surrendered, or they are no fit servants for him. He looks on himself as the supreme source of power, and holds his own will as supreme. This has been the way of power in the world, -those who act under it find that it acts as that from which there is no appeal; it allows not of the maintenance of individual responsibility to God. To act on such responsibility which God implicitly claims, incapacitates at once from serving under it: -"Ye cannot, says the blessed Master, serve God and Mammon"; and so Shadrach, and Meshach, and Abed-nego found, when the point of trial came. The power virtually claimed by the world, is that which admits of no appeal. Nebuchadnezzar was only in this acting over again what had taken place in Eden, -"e shall be as Gods." He would be independent himself, and have all in dependence on him; in this respect, he is the type of the last of his generation, who embodies in himself all the features of direct hostility to God. The king shall do according to his will, and shall exalt himself above every God, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods (Dan. 11:36): the direct contrast of God's king -the one who is just, ruling in the fear of the Lord. The Chaldeans came and said, "There are certain Jews, whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: these men have not regarded thee, they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." These Jews knew Jehovah, as the one only God, -the one only to be worshiped. They knew also that Jehovah had given large dominion to the king.

To have obeyed the king in this his command, would have been to have disobeyed Jehovah, -to have owned his gods, would have been to have disowned Jehovah as their God. What then must be done? they leave their matter in the hand of Jehovah, and suffer from the hands of the king. Their alternative was to obey or suffer. They assert no rights, but the undoubted right to obey God, be the consequences what they may. If rendering to God the things which were God's involved disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar and suffering to themselves, it must be so. -"This is grace, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." This is ever well-pleasing to God, the acknowledging Him in all our ways. They were not only delivered, but publicly justified by the king himself. -"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any gods except their own God." It is quite the same principle now: those who confess Jesus before men, will suffer for it now, but he will confess them publicly when he comes in glory. There may appear to be no present deliverance, even as there was none for Jesus in the eyes of men; but resurrection was the declaration of God's well-pleasedness in him, and his coming in glory will be his public vindication in the eyes of the world. There is always a present unseen blessing to faithfulness now, of which the soul is conscious, even though the deliverance be not yet come. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." But the promise to faithful confession of the name of Jesus, even where there is little strength, is, "Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." The great point of instruction to be gathered from this chapter, is that Shadrach and his companions held themselves responsible for acting on the knowledge they had, that Jehovah himself was the alone object of worship. He had not left it to Nebuchadnezzar to determine this, -this was His prerogative which He never delegates. In all the ample power He had given to Nebuchadnezzar, He had not given him to say who was the God to be worshiped, neither had He allowed him to prescribe the manner in which that worship was to be conducted. God has never allowed man to have a will at all in the matter of worship, He keeps the ordering of it all in His own hands. The very fact of their being "servants of the most high God," at once led them to see that the king had passed the limit

which God had set to his power, and that he was really intruding into the place of God himself, -it was seeming disobedience to the king, but it was really obedience to God, and consequently suffering for righteousness' sake. The tendency of man to turn the power received from God, against God himself, is perhaps more plainly seen in the case of Daniel in the sixth chapter. It was a blessed testimony from adversaries -"we shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." What a fearful display of man's hatred of God, when obedience to him is to be regarded as the highest crime. The supreme power of the state is to be asserted in making a decree, and the one who owned a power superior to that of the state, to be treated as a traitor. They consulted together "to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition, of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions." This was plain enough, -there was no power above that of Darius and his senate. It is not protest, but action which was needed. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and 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." It is on this point that the trial of faith will often turn, owning a power superior to all that is in the world. It was this that gave rise to the misrepresentation in the days of the Apostles.

"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, whom Jason hath received, and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus." Jesus is held up as the rival to Caesar, instead of being acknowledged as the supreme power of God. Men have turned everything upside down themselves, and then accuse others of doing so, because they simply obey God. What a disordered world it must be, when it will not even allow God in his own rightful power to interfere with it. The point is one of such practical and growing importance, that I have dwelt on it at length, and now dismiss it simply noticing that obedience to God and not disobedience to the king, was the principle of the conduct of these holy men. They knew how to render to Nebuchadnezzar his rights, and to God his.

I only briefly notice the fourth chapter, as showing the necessity of the holder of power from God, being brought to acknowledge God in the power which he exercises. It is not irresponsible power, it is not power by compact with men, or any of the varied forms in which it has been exhibited, "but the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." To this end must the heathen be "rebuked" -be "chastised," and therefore the humbling of Gentile pride by fearful judgments. Men may have many thoughts on the question of power, and many theories for settling it, but this is God's thought so to humble men by judgment, as to make them know that power alone is his attribute. Nebuchadnezzar could not use power aright, till after the humbling discipline of being taught that neither wisdom nor power were in him. It is said of the Gentiles, "their judgment and dignity shall proceed of themselves," their characteristic; is being "high-minded," and they must be humbled in order to be blessed. And I cannot refrain noticing the blessed training of the saints now for exercising the power of God. "The world to come" is put under them. And they administer the power of God in blessing, as those who have themselves learned obedience through suffering. They are now learning to acknowledge God in everything, giving to Caesar all his rights, and to Jesus all his; and "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. " When a king shall reign in righteousness, then also princes shall rule in judgment.

I would briefly recapitulate,—

1st, that power is directly from God to whomsoever he may please to give it.

2nd, as it is said of the subjection of all things to Jesus, when he saith all things are subjected unto him, it is manifest that He is excepted which did subject all things unto Him; so in a minor sense, but on the same principle, God in giving lordship to Adam or dominion to Nebuchadnezzar, did not give up His own supremacy.

3rd, that the tendency has been, to use delegated as supreme power, and thus as it were to subject God himself to our own thoughts and ways.

4th, that this necessarily leads to a claim of subjection of the conscience to delegated power, which God claims to own him in his supremacy.

5th, that God has never so delegated power as to interfere with individual responsibility to himself. 6th, that obedience and suffering are always before the saint; and in suffering he has to commit himself to him that judgeth righteously.

But however difficult the path of obedience may be, if it were confined to the simple ascertainment of the limit set to the power which God has delegated in the world; it becomes a great deal more difficult and requiring the exercise of a spiritual understanding, when we find another order of power (namely the Holy Ghost sent of God), for the rule, guidance and instruction of the Church, which is altogether distinct from the power of God given to Nebuchadnezzar. When Jesus was on earth, responsibility to God was acknowledged in the reception of Him. God's due was withheld from Him while the One whom He had sent was rejected. Caesar had his rights, but God put in His claim in the person of his Son, and they disowned His Son, and said we have no king but Caesar. The first duty now of every man is to own Jesus. "Christ is God's," and we are not rendering to God His due, while we are in any wise keeping back from confessing Christ. God brings all to this point, whether they will own His Son or not; everything turns on this point. If I own God in Christ, I shall own God in Caesar; but it is very doubtful whether any do really acknowledge God in Caesar, who do not acknowledge Him in Christ. But Jesus is not now personally present here, He has gone away; and the Holy Ghost who is the immediate author of the life of the Church, is come as the one who exercises sovereign power in that Church.

Now God's power in the world in Caesar, and His power in the Church by the Holy Ghost, are two very different things; Caesar's power has come down from the head of gold, even to the iron mingled with the clay. It may have deteriorated in its descent, as the word of God testifies that it would, but still the power in the world in the present day, is that which God originally granted to Nebuchadnezzar. But the power in the Church, is derived immediately from the head of the Church, the first-born from the dead. He ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. Its character is much more defined than the other. Of Nebuchadnezzar, it is said, "whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down (Dan. 5)." Such a character of power is unknown in the Church. The testimony of one who had it as largely as any, is, "our authority which the Lord has given us for edification, and not for your destruction (2 Cor. 10)." Now the spiritual understanding is especially exercised in marking the distinctness of these two powers. Human ingenuity has constantly attempted to blend them. The power of Nebuchadnezzar was of God, -the power of Caesar was "from above": their divine right to govern was most clear, -to resist them would have been to resist the ordinance of God. But their power was not spiritual, it did not flow from the ascended Jesus; and this new power being introduced into the Church, did not set aside the other power which was already in the world. Caesar had his prerogatives, but Jesus risen had -is also; and these -He has not delegated to Caesar. This is the important point,

the new power introduced; "for the kingdom of God is in power," was of another order: it was not hereditary, not successional, but continued by successive grants to living individuals; "there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, and diversities of ministries but the same Lord, and diversities of operations but the same God who worketh all in all." Caesar might exercise the power of God without at all being cognizant of its source, or owning his responsibility to God in the use of it. But it is impossible to exercise spiritual power, without being cognizant of its source, and owning responsibility to the Lord who has given it. The earliest attempt of men in the Church was to follow the order of the first power, and to exercise authority in the Church by official succession and prescribed canons; and the same Spirit which saw what the end would be of the power delegated to Caesar, saw also what corrupted power in the Church would end in, even the form without the power of godliness. It was easy and natural to recur to Judaism, because these were the rudiments of the world. All was ordered there by "carnal commandment," and the power exercised in the Church came to be that of which man could see the source, and thence followed a mere outward separation by means of ordinances. The high priest of the Jews might have been a bad man, but he was God's ordinance and therefore to be respected (Acts 23:5). Pilate might be a bad man, but God's power was to be owned in him. But in the Church it is the very character of the power which has the only claim to obedience. If we own any power in the Church which is not of the Holy Ghost, we do not render to God the things which are God's. No one dare present himself as having power from God in the Church, who is incapable of commending himself as spiritual to the conscience of those who are spiritual. This is exceedingly important; there is no exercise of judgment with regard to God's power in the world, "the powers that be are ordained of God," it is a simple matter of fact, and then follows due obedience to them as unto God. But in the Church it is a matter of individual responsibility to judge all the pretensions to it. "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed {2 John 10}." To own a false teacher, would be to rob God of his rightful due. The Lord Jesus has not let out of His own hands the giving pastors and teachers for edifying his body the Church. The acknowledgment of the direct power of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and of God's power in Caesar, are two of the most important truths of the day.

But the great principle that power belongeth unto God, is as true in the Church as in the world. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind {XXX}. The exercise of any power in the Church implies responsibility to the Lord from whom it comes, and the owning of it is obedience to Him. He that has it is a servant -a steward, to be faithful in its exercise; and on the other hand, it is to be acknowledged as of God by others, -he that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that rejecteth you rejecteth me. The Lord has not given a deposit of power to the Church, to be used at its will. He has not left it the power of making laws for its government, He has made them Himself; and here again we see a wide distinction between the first and the second order of power. And He gives by the Spirit from time to time, as He is pleased, those who are competent to guide the conscience of the Church, by the rules He has given. It would be a fearful denial of God's rights, to own any other source of power in the world than himself. But surely it would be doubly fearful in the Church, to assert power as coming from itself, -this really is denying the Holy Ghost. The whole Church might agree together to make a canon and to bind it on others, but then the principle for an individual to act on, would be to render to God the things of God. There is a tendency in the minds of many, to set the Church above the Church's Lord; but here again comes in that which the Lord never allows to be touched, -direct individual responsibility to himself. Here is the danger both in the world and the Church, lest the delegated power in either interfere with this. It solves a hundred difficulties to say I must obey Christ. If it is asked by what authority do you preach? I must obey Christ, He has given me the power, and woe unto me if I preach not. By what authority are you gathered together as a body of believers? Obedience to Christ. The great principle is not the assertion of right, but the unqualified duty to obey Christ; and if obedience unto him leads into suffering, even from the powers that be, "it is better if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing."

We are sanctified unto obedience {1 Peter 1:2}; and true godliness really consists in acknowledging the power of God wherever it exists. The magistrate may not own it in himself, but the only warrant of obedience to him, is that we do own it in him. It may too be asserted where it exists not; and then to disown the false pretense, is equally obedience to God -is true godliness. The Spirit of God foretold there should be false teachers, -it would be ungodliness to listen to them. It is surprising what deliverance the bringing in of God effects; it stops all abstract reasonings, and immediately brings the conscience into exercise. Now in the world, the ruler would have the surrender of the conscience to him, and in the Church too many a corporate portion of it would have the conscience surrendered to it; but God says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." God will not surrender His title to the conscience of every man, -He has never delegated this power to any; and how happy for the saints if their consciences were more individually exercised before God.

We have seen man asserting irresponsible power and supreme will in the world. The history of the Church has shown the same tendency, though in quite a different form; and the modern attempt at self-government by many sections of the Church, will be found when analyzed, to partake of the character of irresponsible power and supreme will. Nothing can be more unlike the power of the Holy Ghost, because the exercise of any of His gifts, immediately leads to acknowledged responsibility to the Lord Himself. It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. It makes all the difference as to the godly tone of the soul, whether a saint be exercising a right or an office which other Christians may have given him; or whether he be rendering to God what is His in the use of any power given him by God. And so also it makes a great difference whether the soul is deferring to some office of its own creating; or, recognizing the gift of God in an individual, is led to obey Christ by owning that gift.

There are few principles of more widely extensive application, than that of rendering to God the things which are God's. The world cannot allow in its servants the exercise of a conscience towards God. And where is the Church constitution in our day, which does not virtually claim adherence to itself, as the paramount duty? it does not allow for each being fully persuaded in their own. mind. The moment the sense of individual responsibility to the Lord begins to act, it seems an action against the associated body. There is no room in the associations called Churches, for the exercise of individual responsibility to the Lord. And this is one of their worst features, they tend so to deaden the conscience; and we find persons much more resting on their accredited membership with associated Christians, than on the person of the living Lord. Men will suffer this, because in many instances they themselves are the originators of the very rules by which they are governed, so that direct responsibility to Christ is virtually set aside in both cases.

In the midst of all the abuse of power in man's hand, what a refreshing prospect is before us. Fearful as will be the issue of man's will, both in the world and the Church, when again it may be said "nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do," yet the sure word of prophecy is, "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. And the four and twenty elders which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshiped God, saying, we give thee thanks, O Lord God Al-mighty, which art, and wast, and art to come, because thou host taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned." Yes, the

prospect before the Church of its own glory, is immediately connected with the owning of power in its rightful source, and the exercise of the immediate power of God. -"I heard a voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke arose up forever and ever: and the four and twenty elders, and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia; FOR THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." What Jesus announced, was the gospel of the kingdom of God. And nothing more proves the total disorder of man, than that it is not glad tidings to him, that God is about to take power into his own hands. But that is the real blessing, the one that calls forth praise on earth as well as in heaven. "Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord. For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world righteously and the people with his truth."

The Christian Witness 7: 218-235 (1840).

Notes from Christian Annotator, Matthew 21:43

I would suggest... that "the nation intended" is the future nation of Israel under the new covenant. The proof of this from Scripture appears to me very abundant. It will be granted, I presume, that Israel at present has no national existence, Hos. 3:3.

In connection with the new covenant we find this promise: "If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever (Jer. 30:36)."

The Prophets who had denounced Israel as "a sinful nation." "an hypocritical nation," "a rebellious nation," "a nation not desired," "an ungodly nation," &c., apply to them such titles as "the righteous nation," the true Jeshurun (Isa. 26:2), "My nation" (Isa. 51:4), "The small one become a strong nation" Isa. 60:22, "One nation in the land" (Ezek. 37:22).

These and kindred expressions are, I believe, comprehended under the "all Israel" of Rom. 11:26. Israel as a nation will be spiritually converted. "Thy people shall be all righteous" and politically regenerated, and as such will be the pattern nation during the Millennium Isa. 2:1-4. This, I presume, is their (Rom. 9:4). They will be the fountain of legislation to the nations, instead of copying them as their fathers did (1 Sam. 8:5; Hos. 13:10, 11); and instead of the nation{ s?} of Christendom being the pattern of legislation to them, as in their "high-mindedness" they now vainly imagine.

That "the kingdom is to be given" to Israel is promised (Mic. 4:8). "The daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion, the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." This interesting subject might be pursued. But I only add that Israel's national conversion and political preeminence (Isa. 60:12, appears from Scripture to be entirely sui generis, and by no means interferes with that cluster of spiritual privileges now the portion of all believers, who are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."

Presbutes The Christian Annotator 3:320 (1856).

Christian Witness Papers, Promise of the Lord, The

{1835}

The two leading features of Prophetic testimony, in its immediate application, were the exposure of the principles of Apostasy then at work; and comforting the hearts of the Remnant, who were groaning under the sense of it. The contrast to this was, the testimony of false prophets, who always lulled into security the many, and treated the groaning Remnant as the enemies of God and His people. "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad, and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life; therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations; for I will deliver my people out of your Hand; and ye shall know that I am the Lord (Ezek. 13:22, 23)." In the period just before the Babylonish captivity, we find the two pleas of the Lord against His people to have been, either that they justified continuance in avowed evil, as though the ease was so desperate that they could not serve the Lord; or, that they asserted their innocence, and that their state was one of which the Lord approved. "Thou saidst there is no hope; no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go: yet thou sayest, because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me: behold I will plead with thee, because thou sayest I have not sinned (Jer. 2:25-35)." These therefore are the two things which the Lord hates; -contenfulness with avowed evil, under the plea that there is no remedy for us, so that we must make the best of it; or, forgetting the holiness of God by giving the sanction of His name to that which He disowns, by asserting our innocence and saying, "The temple of the Lord," &c. It is just here that the ministry of the prophets came in; they were raised up, as Apostasy was setting in, and their testimony multiplied as it advanced to a head. The Spirit of Christ in the Prophets, taking up the principles then working, carried them out in all their fearful result, looking through the long and dreary vista to that great and terrible day of the Lord, in which they would be consummated, and met in judgment by the Lord. But while there was the most uncompromising witness against present evil, and testimony of God's sure judgment against it, there was invariably the promise of God's favor and protection towards the feeble Remnant, faithful in the midst of abounding evil. "The hearts of the righteous were not made sad. -" "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings" (Isa. 3:10)." To take one example, -in the prophetic strain of Isaiah, ch. 7 to 12 -The Spirit in the Prophet, at the very time that Apostasy was set in under king Ahaz, after showing the unchangeableness of the counsel of the Lord, which would stand, in spite of all the failures of man, and all the confederacies against it, takes a discursive range, through all its minor developments up to the great Apostasy. But in the midst of this gloomy prospect, there is the word of comfort for the faithful Remnant. "Say ye not a confederacy, to all them to whom

this people shall say a confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. -Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread; and He shall he for a sanctuary." And when the promise of security is thus given to the Remnant, he fully opens the prospect of increasing judgment in the oft repeated burthen, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."

In the Lord Jesus Christ was the perfectness of the Prophet, as well as of the Priest. He was that Prophet into whose mouth Jehovah promised that He would put His words, and that he should speak unto the people all that he commanded them (Deut. 18:18). He had the preeminence as a Prophet, and accordingly we find in our Lord's discourses the principles embodied, which though not understood at the time, were carried out into detail by the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, who led them into all truth, and brought to their remembrance the things that Jesus had spoken unto them. In the 18th of Matthew we find the Lord marking, as His Spirit had done in the Prophets of old, the rise of that which, apparently trivial, would issue in the most disastrous consequences; not only meeting the evil by solemn warning, but viewing it in its results, and comforting His people at all times in the midst of it. The bane of Christianity is there marked, as "Emulation," the total contrast to Him who did not strive nor cry, neither did any man hear His voice in the streets. It is striking to observe how this spirit which is the very cherished principle of the flesh, and which Satan would fain carry into the Church, showed itself in the disciples on occasions apparently the least likely to have excited it. Here we see the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world: that which was to regulate the Church, and that which carries on the world, distinguished and set in the strongest contrast.

In Luke 22 after the Lord had instituted the memorial of His death and sacrifice, and had spoken of His betrayal; instead of finding any sympathy in their minds, we read, "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." And so we read in the chapter before us, "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" This question was asked after Jesus had, by the payment of the tribute money, exhibited the deep humiliation into which He had come for their sakes. The payment of the half-shekel, the offering of the Lord (Ex. 30:13-16) was demanded of Peter, which every one that was numbered, rich or poor, was to give, to make an atonement for their souls, and this money was to be spent in the service of the Temple. Peter answered hastily for his master; but Jesus having first asserted His own right as the Son to be free from the payment, yet, as being made under the law, and having come to redeem them that were under the law, He fulfilled its righteousness in this as well as in the baptism of John. It was at such a season as this when the Son was humbling Himself as the servant, that the minds of the disciples were selfishly seeking exaltation for themselves in the kingdom of heaven. Little did they think that real greatness, the greatness of God, was in His ability to minister to weakness. That He who has His dwelling so high, should humble Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth. That He who inhabits Eternity, and whose name is Holy, should dwell in the humble and contrite heart.

It was in this they needed the whole current of the thoughts of their minds entirely uprooted. They must be converted and become as little Children, or they would not enter into the kingdom of heaven. To come into the lowest place here, was the necessary result of greatness in the kingdom of heaven. The only place of greatness in a world of evil, is necessarily to be of no esteem in it. The world knew not the Son; had He been great in its estimation, its must have been greatness in the estimation of those who had lost all moral perception. This is the hard lesson that we have to learn, and where we are constantly erring as the disciples of old did; the Lord knew it would be because of its contrariety to the flesh. The necessary discipline, in order to teach His people their place of blessing, would be constant mortification, the cutting off the hand, the plucking out the eye. He who knew what was in man, did not merely meet the evil as it showed itself in individuals, but seeing its tendency, most solemnly warns against it, as affecting both the Church and the world. Presumed greatness in any, would be a stumbling block in the way of the weak; power such as the flesh could recognize -authority which the world could own, would always be a stumbling-block in the way of the weak. Even supposing that it was not, as unhappily we know that it hath been exercised against the poor of the flock, yet it would not be that which they needed. Their necessities craved that which was in fullness in the great and good Shepherd; authority in the hands of those who would be examples to the flock, not as those who would lord it over God's heritage. And not only so, the Lord has also marked the effect produced upon the world by the desire of greatness in the Church. He, while in the world, stood the humbled and separate One, and therefore His witness against it was so powerful. He was dead to all that was of credit in it, and thus testified that its deeds were evil: so long as He was in the world, Ile was the light of the world, and His people were to take His place where Ile left it. "Ye are the light of the world." They by their separateness, standing aloof from all its dignity and glory, were thus to be its light. But woe unto the world because of offenses. When His people began to assume worldly greatness and fleshly distinction, then the witness was gone; then the veriest woe came in the world, because it was either deceived into the notion that it was itself owned of God, or confirmed in its unbelief by its quickness to mark the entire inconsistency of the professed disciples of Christ, with the precepts of their Master. This is the woe which now presses on the world; the only convincing testimony to it of the truth of Christianity is gone, the holiness and love of those who profess it. So blind indeed are Christians to this, that amidst all their boasting of an increase of godliness, it rarely comes into their mind that the one thing needful is wanting, both to answer the heart of the Lord Jesus, or the purpose of their being left in the world, "That they may be one," that the world might believe that Jesus was sent of God. The Lord in leading on the minds of His disciples, proceeds on the assumption of their weakness. He takes up that as the place in which His eye ever saw them, He could only recognize them as "little ones"; and just in proportion as their standing in the world was otherwise, they ceased to be subjects of this condescending ministry of love, however in faithfulness He might chasten and rebuke them. He opens to us the great principle of heaven, as being that which ministers to weakness, placed in the situation of danger from surrounding evil. He would have His people always aware of this their blessing that the real feeling of their own weakness, was strength. -It was this that displayed God's power, sustaining weakness, and making it triumphant over every obstacle. "Thy strength is made perfect in weakness." The moment we assume any place of strength, and have that support which the flesh can rest in, our proper strength is gone. No human arrangements, however wisely made, and however, as man may think, directed to the Lord's glory, can avail, because they must necessarily interfere with the revealed principles of Him who "chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." It is therefore as "little ones," that Believers are the subjects of angelic ministry, who are sent forth to minister to them who shall inherit salvation {Heb. 1:14}. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

And this is heaven's blessed ministry; this ministry was His glory who came from heaven, not to be ministered to Himself, but to minister to others. Real greatness needed not the ministry of others; and in an evil world, the only place of real dignity is the ability to rescue from and to keep in the midst of it, that which had no strength against it. "The Son of Man is come to save that which is lost." But as if to open to us the whole mind of heaven, and to show us its most favored aspect towards us -as if to meet the subtle lie of Satan, that our insignificance is beneath God's notice, the Lord proceeds in the detail of blessedness of those who have no strength, to show how their necessity is graciously met. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." Thus out of weakness are they

made strong. The Lord keep us in the abiding sense of the blessedness of our portion as little children.

That which the Lord had first applied in the way of individual blessing, He next applies to the Church collectively. He would not allow of an appeal from any of His people to the world, because it was a tribunal incapable of judging between brethren. -Its judgment being necessarily based on presumed right, not on grace. Hence, the injured party is put by our Lord in the place of the conciliator. -"if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; and, if he shall hear thee, then thou hast gained thy brother {Matt. 18:15}." This rule would necessarily prevent the assumption of preeminence among brethren; he would really be the greatest in the estimation of heaven, who had most to bear. The only appeal was to the Church, as that which alone could judge righteous judgment; and its award, in case of unsubmission to its authority, was putting without its pale, regarding the offender as a heathen man and a publican. It appears to me, that the Lord still keeping in view the tendency of the principle then at work in the disciples' minds, as that which would seek after visible greatness in the world, casts contempt upon all its glory by only owning it as the place into which those would be driven who were excluded by the Church. The solemn sentence of the Church, in excluding any from fellowship, would appear, in the sight of men, as a powerless act, attended with no immediate results, and not affecting the person or property of the offender. How unlike the award of a worldly tribunal; there the convicted offender is affected by its sentence in present shame, and loss of property, liberty, or life. But the seeming powerless sentence of those, to be excluded from whose fellowship would appear nothing to be dreaded, had the sanction of heaven, and involved consequence not unseen but permanent. "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven {Matt. 18:18}." The leading feature of this discourse of our blessed Lord, is the constant counteraction of the desire after greatness, such as would be cognizable by men. He is always putting His people and the Church in the place of weakness on earth, and giving them strength in heaven. His people, if in their proper place, would be, as Himself, the weak One on earth; for He "was crucified through weakness," but strong in the unseen power of God. Thus has the Lord met the necessities of His people at all times; however fearful the tide of Apostasy, it could never shut out the real blessing of the faithful Remnant, be it ever so small -And the reason is, that whatever fearful exhibition of evil there may be in the visible Church, and however unable an insignificant minority are to testify against it, or to meet it in ostensible power, yet the blessing of the dispensation is open to them; and however little their strength, it is real, for it is the strength of heaven. And in order to meet the extremity of the case of His people, He who foresaw the fearfulness of that Apostasy which would come in, through the desire after greatness and love of preeminence; most graciously meets the case of the feeble few, faithful to Him in their weakness. "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven: for where two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name, there am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:19, 20}." Now taking this in its moral connection with the point from which our Lord began this discourse, I believe it to be the abiding testimony to the blessing of His people under all circumstances. We have seen the Church sat up most mighty in power and authority, in its entire separateness from the world, even to the merging of all worldly distinction in it. We have seen its spiritual and unseen power, acknowledged even by those without (Acts 2:43-47; 4:37). We have seen Ichabod written on all this; and in vain search for another exhibition of convincing testimony against the world, by heavenly power and unity. That which then wrought in the minds of the disciples, even emulation, soon wrought effectually in the Church; and being of the flesh, led the Church to seek that greatness which the flesh could recognize; and has issued in that which we do see in Christendom -a system avowedly great in the earth, boasting its superior light above surrounding nations, apparently swaying their destinies, accrediting every worldly distinction, and giving the authority of heaven to principles the most opposite to those of Christ. This is beginning to be felt and acknowledged by thousands; and what shall they do? whither shall they go? what would avail their feeble protest against evils inveterate, fondly cherished, and so entwined with everything around them? To reconstitute the Church would be to subvert Christendom. Now the question in many minds naturally is -The professing Church has not abode in the goodness of God -it is that which is to be judged. -Are we still to tolerate it? still to cry "the temple of the Lord?" &c. Again, we can see nothing standing in the plenitude of authority to which to look. Shall we say there is no hope? It is here the Lord meets His perplexed people; He neither forces them to own that as of Him, which He disowns Himself (save as to judgment,) nor drives them to despair by holding out no hope. Here is their rest {Matt. 18:20},—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And this is the peculiar blessing of our dispensation -the promise of the Lord's presence by His Spirit, under all circumstances -"Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Let the Remnant be ever so small, even, if it were possible amidst the visible body, two or three only, still the blessing remains to them. The beauty and glory are departed; but to so insignificant a Remnant as this, is the word addressed by the Lord, "Meet together in my name"; and the promise, "I am in the midst of you." That which constitutes this very dispensation -the abiding presence of the Comforter -the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, is what we are continually prone to forget. We are ever inclined to that which the world can receive, instead of casting ourselves upon that which is our portion. It is not now to go here or there; the Father is not to be worshiped in any given place, neither are Believers to look to anything ostensible to attach themselves to; but to meet together in the name of Jesus. Meeting in His name is the entire counteraction of the two snares to which we are exposed;-either of courting fellowship with the world, or cherishing sectarian feelings. Men have been so long accustomed to seek the strength of an Establishment to rest on, as almost, if not altogether, to forget the communion of the saints. This is never closed to us by the Lord, however it may be to our unbelief; and the proof is this -that even two, shall experience the blessing of it; for where the Lord's presence is, can there be anything lacking? It is therefore that the Apostle so presses the "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" {Heb. 10:25} as that which would cheer and direct us in trying circumstances. But union with the world, or the exclusion of any brethren, hinders this effectually; the Lord's Spirit is grieved or restrained, because we are not gathered {together} in {unto} His name Our foolish hearts crave something imposing -it is most contrary to them to continue in the faith of God's promise -we have to watch against an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. We have to watch against ourselves lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. And that is deceitful which would make us judge by appearances, and not righteous judgment; this we never exercise, except in doing God's will. We are never, I believe, except by our own unbelief, placed in circumstances of balancing evil in order to choose the lesser. So full is the Word of God in its detail, so elastic are its principles, that we can be placed in no trying circumstances but we shall find a way for us to escape, through the Spirit applying the Word, and thus guiding us by His counsel. Now the dilemma in which many of the Lord's people suppose themselves to be placed, is this -They allow that it does no violence to their conscience to accredit as of the Lord, any system wherein the world has dominance; and they cannot construe into an approval of evil, His long-suffering with it. But they allege that they cannot see anything around them with that real moral glory with which the Church was once invested; and which might claim their attachment by affording that resting place which their hearts sorrow after. They are in a strait; and if they do not violence to their conscience, it either interrupts their peace, or hinders their service. It is here the Lord meets them. He anticipated all their weakness, as well as their possible fewness. He knew the desire of their heart unto Him, and could sympathize with that hesitation which would falter in acting in the face of presumed authority, and prevented, if we may use the expression, the desire of a real visible authority to stay upon, by throwing His people entirely off it on Himself. "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name, there am I in the midst of them." Here therefore will be the wisdom of those who are led, by God's Spirit, to the

discovery of the fearful departure of the Church from the goodness of God. While they will mourn over their common sin in the departure of that glory which the Lord, on leaving the earth, bequeathed to His Church, they will not be looking for that which might present itself as another witness for Christ, in all the glory of power and authority; but, remembering whence they are fallen, will be zealous and repent; and in their penitence they are met by the Lord, who, though He has no where pledged Himself to reconstitute that which man has marred, has pledged Himself to His people to be ever with them. And in the blessing thus secured to them, He has provided, at the same time, for the honor of His own name He has invested them with power to put away from them any one, who is called a brother, who continues to walk disorderly after being warned. Thus, in the worst possible circumstances, two things are secured to the Lord's people, -their strength and comfort in His presence, and their right to regard as a heathen man and a publican, any one who brings a scandal on his profession, and blasphemes that holy name by which He is called. The people of the Lord can always act; if they be His, they have His Spirit, and in that Spirit can meet together, and by that Spirit they can judge, and withdraw themselves from any brother who, after remonstrance, still continues to walk disorderly. So that the comfort of His worshipers and the purity of His worship, is secured, by this charter of the ever gracious and loving Lord, to His very feeble Remnant. The simple principle is, that the Lord would never oblige His people to sin. Now I believe it to be just as binding on a Christian to meet together with Christians, as to abstain from those things which may even shock the natural conscience. There is one Lawgiver; and who shall presume to say where His authority is to be qualified? He that said "I say unto you, Swear not at all," said also, "Let him be to thee a heathen man and a publican"; and the one ought to be no less binding on the conscience of a true disciple than the other.

This I believe to be the leading of the mind of the great Prophet of the Church throughout this discourse. Clearly perceiving where the spirit working in the minds of His Disciples would issue, He looks to that, and amidst all the maze of difficulty in which they might be placed, provides the simple way for their escape, and in the darkest periods of the Church's history, we can find those who have been obedient to the Lord's direction, and find the blessing. The Lord Jesus the Prophet, has not made the hearts of His people sad, nor strengthened the hearts of the wicked. He has not forced them into the assertion, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these," as though He sanctioned every species of worldliness; nor reduced them to the plea of slothfulness -"there is no hope, the matter is desperate." All that is needed for action and blessing, is faith in Lord's word. He never is contented with the evil, however His people may be. It is a most fearful instance of the want of a sound mind, when we find so much perverse ingenuity, so many subtleties, so many analogies drawn, in order to lull the awakened consciences of many into contentedness with evil. Here is a plain direction of our Lord, which was given for them to act on, and applicable to any circumstances. And here is a plain answer to those who charge that as schism, which is bounden duty -separation from the world, as a necessary preliminary in order to our meeting together in the name of Jesus (i.e., being gathered together, by the Spirit, unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone: Matt. 18:20}. Blessed be His name, He has not left us comfortless; and while it becomes us to be humbled to the very dust, for our grievous departure from Him, let us not add this to all our other sins, either to charge Him with unfaithfulness, or to tempt Him by saying, is God among us or not? Whoever believeth on Him shall never be confounded; even in the most disastrous times, when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold, the Lord's people may assemble together, and exhort one another, and the more so as they see the day approaching. As it was of old, so it is now -"Ye have said, it is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts, and now we call the proud happy, yea, they that work wickedness are set up, yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name And they shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him (Mal. 3:14-17)."

The Christian Witness 2:128-139 (1835).

Believe and Live, Two Rests - Salvation and Communion, The: Matthew 11:28-30

MATTHEW 11:28-30

There are two rests spoken of here-the rest of salvation, and the rest of communion. The second rest cannot be known without the first: the first is the introduction to the second. Let us look at them both. And first,

THE REST OF SALVATION

Nothing can be more simple than the way in which salvation is here presented in the aspect of rest. Blessed word! What is rest? It is a ceasing from labor. Those who need rest, those by whom rest is welcomed, are those who labor; and, accordingly, such are they to whom Jesus Himself speaks of rest. And how—oh, how does He present the thought to the already wearied one? Does He speak of work in another field? Does He change the sphere of the working one’s toil, but still direct him to work in another way? Does He speak to the worn and jaded heart of one single effort in another direction? No; not one, not one.

Oh, laboring soul, listen to His words — not mine, not man’s — but His: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Hast thou ever heard anything so sweet, so suited to thy case as this? Yes, toiler for salvation, worker for eternal life, poor heavy-laden soul, this word is for thee! Jesus GIVES — I beg you mark that word — GIVES rest! And what a rest! A rest as perfect as the One who gives it, and a rest which, therefore, leaves nothing further to be provided, and nothing more to be desired. “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4: 13, 14); “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). It is a, rest which the word of, Jesus is pledged to give. And mark, beloved reader it is a present rest; for it is linked with coming — that is, the one who comes will not ba kept waiting, but will get rest the moment He comes.

There was one who, under the power of His gracious words, began to long for rest, and came in spirit to Him, ere she knew to Whom she had come; but she was not kept waiting, for His “I that speak unto thee am He” rolls away the burden from that sin-stricken heart, and sets the accusing conscience at rest forever (Heb. 10:2), and so fills the heart with His own joy, that self is lost sight of altogether, and nothing is before her heart but the One who has told her “all things that ever she did,” and the precious souls around her who are strangers as yet to that rest which her own heart so fully knows (John 4).

There was another who, in the midst of a lucrative calling, found his conscience accusing, and his heart unsatisfied, and the desire of his soul that which the world could not give; and he ran and climbed a sycamore-tree to get a sight of Jesus. He was not kept waiting; for what “I that speak unto thee am he” had been to the woman of Samaria, “Zacchæus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house,” was to Zacchæus; and Zacchæus was at rest.

Beloved reader, let me ask you the question ere I proceed further, “Is this, first rest yours, or are you still seeking rest, but finding none?” Listen again to His “Come unto ME.” Mark that He does not say to this or that so-called “place of worship,” or to this or that ordinance, or to this or that man, but “unto ME.” And let me, for your encouragement, give you His own words, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

And now let us turn for a little moment to the second rest.

THE REST OF COMMUNION.

This is the rest which the believer finds in learning the Lord’s mind so as to be able to work for Him with the assurance that He has set us to work, that we are therefore doing that which is according to His mind in the way which is according to His mind — that is, really, that we have no mind or will of our own in service, but that He is working in us. This is the blessed rest which Mary had in Luke 10: she “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word.” Martha was “cumbered” and “careful;” Mary had “chosen that good part.” Do not suppose, dear reader, that Martha ought to have been doing at the same time just the same thing as Mary—that is, sitting “at Jesus’ feet” — for these bodies of ours must be cared for; but that, had she learned the heart of Jesus as Mary had, she would have been doing her work “as unto the Lord,” (Col. 3:23), and in grace rejoicing in her sister’s blessed leisure.

The first rest, then, is found in knowing Jesus as the Savior; the second, in learning Him as the pattern. The mistake which many thousands of really earnest souls are making is, that they are trying to learn the second rest before they have experienced the first — trying to learn Jesus as the Model before they have learned Him as the Savior. This can never be: and for the simple reason that till Christ is known as the Savior there is no life to God (John 3:36; Eph. 2; 1 John 5:12); and hence no power to walk, no power to act for God at all. And hence, such souls not only get no peace, but, endeavoring to be holy while strangers to the power of holiness (2 Cor. 5:14, 15), they get, in spirit, under the law which was given by Moses (John 1:17), and instead of getting peace, they get far more wretched and miserable than they were before. And no wonder; for the testimony of the law is, that the man who keeps God’s judgments and statutes shall live by them (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11). But the poor, laboring soul under law soon finds how utterly incapable he is of keeping it according to God’s standard (Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10: 25-28; Matt. 5:28; 1 John 3:15; James 2:10).

Moreover, to aggravate his sorrow, and fill up his cup of wretchedness to the brim, he finds that not only is he no nearer God than he was at the first, but that he is CURSED; for it is written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). Such is the result of trying to learn that which is alone the effect of the second rest: true service to God, without the knowledge of the first. The “terror of the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:11) is all that is learned, and an unsatisfied and accusing conscience the result. I repeat, the first rest is the gate through which the second is entered. There cannot be true rest of soul except in the reception of this first rest into the heart; and this rest, in one word, is Christ.

I may here apply a word morally, for the sake of illustration, which is found in another connection in Heb. 4:10: “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” So I may say, dear reader, that the one who has entered into this blessed rest of which we are speaking, salvation, is the one who has ceased from all his own works, doings, for salvation, and has learned that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”

“Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that BELIEVE: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be JUST, and the JUSTIFIER of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:20-26).

Come now to Jesus! Take Him, trust Him, appropriate Him by faith in His finished work for you (John 19:30), and your heart shall know, the moment you believe, the full joy and blessedness of the first rest, and through grace, shall be enabled to prove the practical power which the second gives to walk to His glory.

R. H. G.

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