

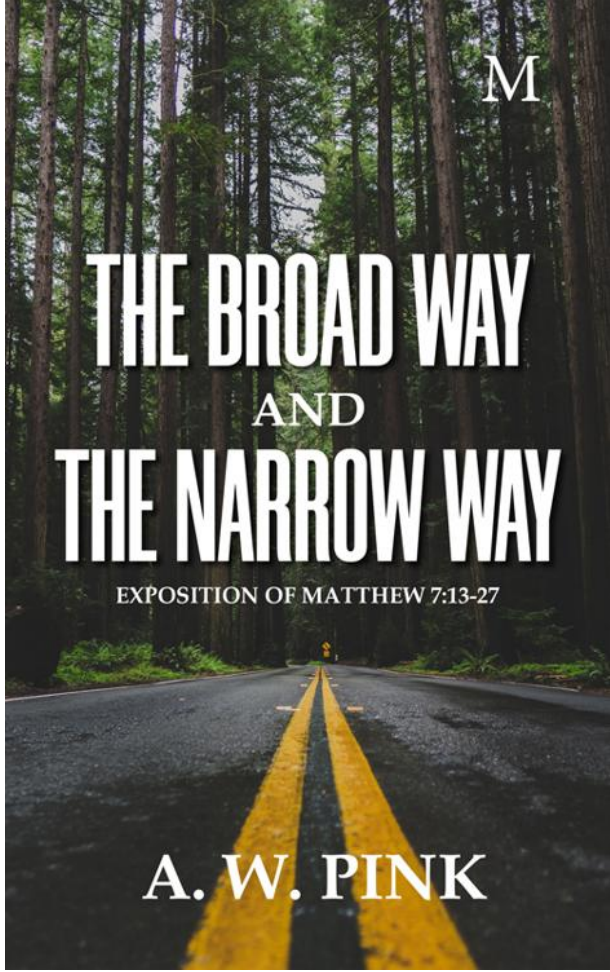


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THE BROAD WAY AND THE NARROW WAY

EXPOSITION OF MATTHEW 7:13-27

A. W. PINK



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AND
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The Broad Way and the Narrow Way

by A. W. Pink

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The Way of Salvation

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,

which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:13, 14

The verses to which we have now come are closely connected with the previous sections of the Lord's Sermon, in which He had described the character of those who were the subjects of His kingdom and had laid down the rules by which they must walk. Such teaching as He had given out was at direct variance with the popular views entertained by His hearers. The Jews supposed that they were all to be the subjects of the Messiah, simply from being the natural descendants of Abraham and because they bore in their flesh the mark of the covenant. But throughout this discourse the Lord Jesus had made it abundantly clear that something more essential than physical lineage and submission to ceremonial rites was required to make them spiritual heirs of the patriarch. There was a straiter gate which had to be entered than any privilege which natural birth gave admittance to, a narrower way to be traversed than that religious life mapped out by the scribes and the Pharisees. Only those are accounted the true children of Abraham who have his faith (Rom. 4:16), who do his works (John 8:39), and who are vitally united to Christ (Gal. 3:29).

If the teaching of Christ was radically different from that in which the Jews of His day had been brought up, it is in equally sharp contrast with most of the concepts which now prevail in Christendom. If the Jews were completely ignorant of the high and searching requirements of God's holiness it cannot be said that our own generation is any better informed. If they plumed themselves on being the children of Abraham, a large percentage of our people complacently assume that they are members of a "Christian nation." If they believed that the rite of circumcision secured for them the favour of God, multitudes in our churches imagine that the sprinkling of water on the brow of an infant obtains for it a passport to heaven. And even in those circles which are better instructed, for the most part salvation is offered on much easier terms, far more acceptable to the natural man, than those prescribed by the incarnate

Son of God. The analogy may be extended still farther, for if it was the religious leaders of Israel who most strenuously opposed our Lord, it is those now making the loudest claims to orthodoxy that are the bitterest antagonists of the Truth.

In support of our assertion that the doctrine of Christ is directly contrary to the ideas now so prevalent in Christendom, take His solemn and express declaration that few there be that find life, which, we shall see as we proceed, means that only a few will reach heaven. But who is there today that really believes this? Where is the place in which such a truth is boldly and plainly uttered? We know of none. On the contrary it is generally assumed, yea, said openly, that many, that "millions," that the greater part of the human race will obtain eternal felicity. Let any man who "attends church" die, and no matter how worldly his life or how crooked his business dealings, do not his friends say with one consent "he is now at rest," and is not the preacher expected to declare in his funeral sermon that the deceased is "better off"? If anyone should dare to dissent is he not at once condemned for being "harsh and uncharitable"? The tree, forsooth, is not to be known by its fruits but by the label some parsonic (parson) gardener has attached to it.

The unwelcome but faithful objector may call attention to our Lord's statement that His flock is a "little"—Greek "very little" —one (Luke 12:32), but the religious world will not listen to him. He must not challenge the Christian profession of his fellows. He must not look for perfect people in this world. We all have our failings, and though some believe differently from himself, yet their hearts are right, and though others may be slack in performing certain duties, let him remember that they claim to be trusting in the finished work of Christ, and therefore it is highly reprehensible for anyone to doubt them. So far from believing that only a few will reach heaven, the vast majority in Christendom today hold that somehow, in some way, the greater part of our fellows will get there. Hell, if there be such a place, is reserved for arch-criminals and villains, just as our prisons

house only a small fraction of the population—the "unfortunates" and "misguided" ones.

And why is it that there are scarcely any left among us who really believe that only the few will reach heaven? There can only be one answer: because it is now generally held that heaven can be obtained on much easier terms than those prescribed by Christ. The adulterous generation in which our lot is cast are quite sure that heaven can be reached without treading the only way which leads there, that the kingdom of God can be entered without passing through "much tribulation" (Acts 14:22), that we may be disciples of Christ without denying self, taking up our cross and following Him (Matthew 16:24). They do not believe that if their right eye offends it must be plucked out and if their right hand offends it must be cut off (Matthew 5:29, 30). They do not believe that if they live after the flesh they shall die, and that only if through the Spirit they mortify the deeds of the body they shall live (Rom. 8:13). They are fully persuaded that a man can serve two masters and succeed in "making the best of two worlds." In short, they do not believe the gate is as "strait" nor the way as "narrow" as Christ declared it to be.

All we have to do in order to be saved is to respond to Christ's gracious invitation and "come unto Him." Ah, but that "all" is by no means the simple matter that many think and that so many evangelists falsely represent it to be. We have to turn our back upon the world and forsake our cherished sins in order to turn our face unto Christ, as the prodigal had to leave the far country, where he had spent his substance in riotous living, before he could come to the Father. Christ is the Holy One of God and will not be the minister of sin. Love for the things of this world closes the heart against Him. What caused the young man to go away from Christ sorrowing, after some fair show of willingness to be His disciple, but love of possessions? What restrained the invited guests from accepting the invitation to the marriage feast, but immoderate affection to the husbanding of a farm and proving of oxen (Matthew 22:5)? "Whosoever is under the government of this lust (covetousness) can

no more believe in Christ than a man lying under a heap of rubbish or at the bottom of the sea can see the glory of the heavens. The intentness of the eye on one object hinders it from the view of another" (S. Charnock).

When the Philippian jailer asked "What must I do to be saved?" all the apostle answered was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Waiving now the fact that that was not the idle inquiry of one who was still in love with the world and taking his fill of its pleasures, but instead the distressed cry of one who was desperate, let it be pointed out that while believing in Christ is a simple and easy act considered in itself, yet it becomes a very hard and difficult thing to us by reason of the opposition made thereto by our inward corruptions and the temptations of Satan. To forgive our enemies and love those who persecute and despitefully use us is, considered as a notion of the mind, easy to be performed, but try and bring your heart to do the same and you will discover it lies beyond your own unaided powers. As a motion of the mind it is both simple and delightful to cast all our care upon Him who careth for us (1 Pet. 5:7), yet a poor man, in ill health and the father of a big family, does not find it easy to perform. No heart can tear itself away from the world and hate beloved lusts without first experiencing the mighty operations of the Holy Spirit!

"Enter ye in at the strait gate" says Christ at the beginning of our passage, and that this is far from being an easy thing to do appears from His word on another occasion: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). That He should employ such an expression clearly implies the slothfulness and carelessness which characterize mere nominal professors, as it also denotes that there are real difficulties and formidable obstacles to be overcome. The Greek word there used for "strive" (*agonizomai*) is a very expressive and emphatic one, meaning "agonize." It occurs again in 1 Corinthians 9:25, "and every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things:" the reference is to the athletes who took part in the marathon races, willing to undergo the most self-denying discipline

to be at their fittest, thereby hoping to win an earthly crown. This word rendered "strive" is translated "labouring fervently" in Colossians 4:12, and "fight" in 1 Timothy 6:2! Ah, my reader, becoming a Christian is not done simply by holding up your hand in a religious meeting or signing some "decision" card. Alas, that such multitudes have been deceived by these satanic catch-pennies.

"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12), like an army storming a city and capturing the same. We have often read of earthly kingdoms being obtained by violence, but it seems surprising to hear of such means being used upon the kingdom of heaven. How are we to understand this? Why, thus: "violence" here does not signify unlawful assaults, but earnest deliberation. It is not an injurious violence like that which seizes earthly prizes, but a holy and industrious violence, intensity of desire and endeavour, persevering zeal which refuses a denial. It is a determination to master all difficulties, to break through all impediments and surmount every obstacle. Such violence was necessary then: "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13), but did all they could to oppose them. So now: godless relatives and worldly companions will seek to deter the earnest seeker after Christ, but he must not be deterred if he would find. "The kingdom of heaven was never intended to indulge the ease of triflers, but to be the rest of them that labour" (Matthew Henry).

"Enter ye in at the strait gate." It is not enough to listen to preaching about this "gate," nor to study its structure or admire the wisdom of its appointment: it must be entered. Sermons on repentance and faith in Christ avail us nothing unless they move our hearts to comply therewith. The Greek word here rendered "strait" signifies restrained, cramped, or better "narrow" as it is rendered in the R.V. And what is meant by this strait or narrow gate? A "gate" serves two purposes: it lets in and shuts out. This gate is the only avenue of admittance to that "way" which leads unto life, and all who enter not

by it are eternally barred from the presence of God and the realm of ineffable bliss. The second use of this "gate" is solemnly illustrated at the close of the parable of the virgins. The foolish ones lacked the necessary "oil" (the work of the Spirit in the heart), and when they sought to obtain it the Bridegroom came and "the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10), and though they besought Him to open it unto them, He answered "I know you not."

What is denoted by entering this narrow gate? Chiefly three things. First, the acceptance of those teachings of truth, of duty, of happiness, which were unfolded by Christ: the honest and actual receiving into the heart of His holy, searching and flesh-withering instructions. Those teachings may be summed up in His emphasis upon the righteous claims and demands of God upon us and His insistence upon our depraved state and wicked enmity against Him. No one can become a Christian while he entertains any doubt upon the Divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, or while he refuses to bow to the verdict which God has pronounced upon him. We must know ourselves to be utterly lost before there can be any desire for salvation, and we must accept God's sentence of condemnation upon us ere we know how guilty we are in His sight. There can be no traversing the narrow way itself until we set to our seal that God is true when He declares we are "all as an unclean thing," that there is "no soundness" in us. It is by relinquishing error, the lies of Satan, and receiving the Truth that we pass through the strait gate.

Second, the exercise of true repentance. "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent" (Matthew 4:17). It was announced of His forerunner that he should "prepare the way of the Lord." And how did he do so? By making ready a people to receive Him when He appeared before them as "the Lamb of God." And in what did that readiness consist? This, that they repented, confessed their sins, and owned that death was their due by being buried in baptism in the Jordan by him (Luke 3:1-6). The Gospel is not less holy than the Law and therefore it requires that our hearts bewail our former

transgressions of the Law and be firm and sincere in its resolution against all future sin. "You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together. No one sin may you keep. They must all be given up: they must be brought out like the Canaanitish kings from the cave and hanged up before the sun. You must forsake them, abhor them, and ask the Lord to overcome them" (C. H. Spurgeon). It is by abandoning our idols and the pleasures of sin that we pass through the strait gait.

Third, the complete surrender of ourselves to God in Christ. This will anticipate an objection which some may be ready to make: not the Lord Jesus "the Door" (John 10:9)? Yes, and He is so according to the three principal functions of His mediatorial office: He is "the Door" into God's presence as He is Prophet, Priest and King. To believe savingly in Christ is to receive Him as Prophet to instruct us, as Priest to atone for us, and as King to rule over us. Only as His holy teachings are really accepted by a contrite heart is any soul prepared to place any value on His cleansing blood, and the sincerity of our acceptance of Him as Priest is evidenced by our readiness to submit to His royal sceptre, for like His types He is first the King of righteousness and after that the King of peace (Heb. 7:2). Christ's cleansing blood is available to none who are unwilling to throw down the weapons of their warfare against God: they must forsake their way if they would be pardoned (Isa. 55:7). Only by a serious dedication of ourselves unto God through Christ can we become enjoyers of the riches of His grace. It is by a complete surrender of ourselves unto God that we pass through the strait gate.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate." Here were "duty repentance" and "duty faith" with a vengeance, for this exhortation is obviously addressed unto the unsaved: "Enter ye in" definitely implies they were yet outside. And unto whom was Christ speaking? Not to heathen idolaters, who were without any knowledge of the true God. No, it was to those who believed in Jehovah and who received the Scriptures as His very Word. It was to those who averred "we have one Father, even God" (John 8:41). Nevertheless, despite all their

knowledge of the Truth and enjoyment of external privileges, they had never entered that gate which alone admitted to the only way which leadeth unto life This same exhortation is equally applicable and pertinent today unto multitudes of church members who, notwithstanding their profession and performances, have never been born again. In this exhortation Christ makes it plain to His ministers that He would have them recognize the responsibility of their hearers, and call upon the unregenerate to discharge their duties.

"For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." In those words our Lord advanced a reason or argument to enforce His previous exhortation. There is another gate than the "strait" one, altogether different therefrom, for it is "wide" and gives entrance into a broad way, but it leads to the bottomless pit. It is "the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2), in which all its unregenerate citizens are found. It is the path of self-will and self-gratification. It is "wide" because those in it own no restrictions. They have broken down the commandments of God which were designed to be a hedge about them. It is therefore a pleasant and easy way to the flesh, for no inquiry or diligent search has to be made in order to find it, no resolution and perseverance are called for in order to continue treading it, no self-denial has to be practiced to remain therein. A dead fish can float with the stream, but only a living one can swim against it: so the unregenerate mechanically follow this road, for there is nothing in them to resist the law of gravity. The going is smooth and easy because it is all downhill!

It is a crowded road, for "many there be which go in thereat." It is the very width of it which renders it so attractive to the carnal mind. Here there are no "quota" limitations, no barring of "aliens," no restrictions of color, caste or creed. There is plenty of room for all. Men may walk in the ways of their hearts and in the sight of their eyes, give rein to their lusts and full indulgence to their inclinations, and none shall hinder them. This broad road is thronged because all mankind are in it by nature, birth admitting them into the same; nor

has anyone the slightest desire to desert it unless a miracle of grace be wrought upon him. Like Lot and his wife in Sodom every last one of us is so loath to leave the city of destruction that the Christian too had preferred to remain there and perish, unless the Lord had sent His messengers to "pluck" him as a brand from the burning. "Woe to the multitude of many people" (Isa. 17:12) says God to this densely packed road.

It is a deceptive road, for few upon it have any idea of whither it is taking them. Those upon it believe they are following the wise course, for they regard as fools those who differ from them. We are only young once, life is short, let us have a gay time while it lasts; let us eat, drink and be merry seems to them the very dictates of common sense. Ah, it is "the way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). So sure are its travelers they are right that they conclude anyone is afflicted with "religious mania" who prefers the narrow way. Yet it is a fatal road, for it "leadeth to destruction," hopeless and eternal destruction. It conducts to the bottomless pit, the unquenchable fire, and the undying worm. It is the way of the ungodly, and Scripture expressly declares that "the way of the ungodly shall perish"(Ps. 1:6). And, my reader, that fatal way can only be abandoned by conversion, by a radical right about face, by turning from sin and self-pleasing and turning unto God and holy living.

Narrow Is the Way Which Leadeth unto Life

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Matthew 7:14, 15

As Christ was the antitype of Melchizedek and Aaron, the antitype of David and Solomon, so also was He the antitypical Moses (Deut. 18:18) and Samuel, and therefore in the fulfillment of His commission He could say unto His hearers, "I set before you the way of life, and the way of death" (Jer. 21:8). This is precisely what He did in the verses before us: He likens our passage through life to a journey, a journey from time unto eternity. There are but two possible destinations unto which each of us is travelling, for we are treading the path which leads to heavenly bliss or the road which conducts to the eternal torments of hell. That we may ascertain which of those ways we are on, Christ gave a brief and clearly identifying description of each of them, defining the entrance thereto, the breadth thereof, and the numbers thereon. God has ordained two distinct places to be the final abodes of men after this life, and between them He has fixed a great gulf so that none can pass from the one to the other (Luke 16:26), and equally great is the distance and the difference between the ways leading to them and the character and conduct of those walking along the one and the other, for the former are the children of God, whereas the latter are the children of the Devil.

This drawing such drastic lines of discrimination, this definite and circumscribed classification, is not at all acceptable to those who traverse the spacious road leading to destruction. They pride themselves on their broadmindedness and liberality and resent anything which suggests that all is not well with them. They know their characters are not white, yet would not allow for a moment they were black, so persuade themselves they are a shade midway between. They may not be good enough for heaven, but they are quite sure they are not bad enough for hell. That is why the papish invention of a "purgatory" is so popular with multitudes of people, and just as they would fondly believe there is another place besides heaven and hell, so they like to think there is another class besides saints and sinners. But if our thoughts be formed according to the teaching of Holy Writ we are shut up to this inevitable and sole

alternative, light or darkness, truth or error, Christ or Belial, holiness or sin, salvation or damnation.

Christ began this solemn and searching portion of His Sermon with the exhortation, "Enter ye in at the strait gate," which we understand to mean: first, jettison all your own ideas and receive the Truth as a little child (Matthew 18:3), bowing to its sentence of condemnation. Second, abandon your course of self-pleasing, bewail your rebellion against God and set your heart firmly against sill. Third, surrender yourself to God's righteous claims and yield yourself unreservedly to the Lordship of Christ. That exhortation is enforced by the following reason: "for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." All who are unconverted proceed along it. "It hath in it various paths suited to men's different humors and inclinations. The covetous and the spendthrift, the profligate and the hypocrite, the Antinomian and the Pharisee, the sons and daughters of pleasure and the grave designing politicians and proud philosophers, decent moralists and infamous debauchees, have their several paths and their select companies; they mutually despise and condemn each other, yet they all keep one another in countenance by agreeing to oppose the holy ways of the Lord" (Thomas Scott).

Yet pleasant as the broad way may be to the flesh and popular as it is with the masses, it ends in unutterable woe and everlasting torments.

How necessary it is then, that each of us should give heed to that injunction, "Ponder the path of thy feet" (Prov. 4:26). Men are ready enough to do so in temporal matters, why not so in spiritual? They do not enter a train or even a bus without first ascertaining where it is bound for: then why not pause and ask, Whither will this godless mode of life take me? In which direction are my feet pointed: heavenward or hellward? So immeasurable is the distance betwixt those two bodies, so vast is the difference between life and destruction, that we are called upon to exercise the utmost care and conscience in using every Divinely prescribed means for attaining the

one and escaping the other. In the verses we are now considering Christ faithfully warns us that if we are to have a well-grounded hope of attaining the home of the blessed we must give heed to that commandment, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).

There appears to have been some uncertainty in the minds of our translators concerning the exact relation between verse 14 and its immediate context, for it will be observed that they have suggested "How" as an alternative to its opening "Because." In the preceding verse our Lord had given a brief but emphatic exhortation which He had followed with a solemn reason to enforce the same. What then is the precise force of verse 14, which obviously returns to the original exhortation? If we take the marginal rendering, then verse 14 constitutes an exclamation, occasioned by what has been said of the broad way and the multitudes which choose to tread it. But if we take it as it reads, and which we regard as preferable, then verse 14 contains an amplification. First, informing us that entering in at the strait gate is not the end itself, but only a means thereto, for it gives entrance to the "narrow way" which has to be traversed if life is to be obtained. Second, it plainly announces that the walk thereon will be both difficult and lonely, for only the "few" succeed in finding it. And third, it offers encouragement or presents a powerful incentive by assuring its travelers that life lies at the end of it.

It seems to us there is yet another way of ascertaining the relation of verse 14 to its context, and that is by linking it not with the whole of the preceding verse but with its last clause, thus: "and many there be which go in thereat, because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." Considered thus it is a word of explanation, informing us why the multitudes prefer the road which leads to destruction: the only alternative path repels them. The straitness of its entrance and the narrowness of its course present no attraction for the lovers of fleshly license and worldly pursuits and pleasures; on the contrary, the way which leads unto life is diametrically opposed to their ideas and inclinations. They may offer a hundred

excuses why they seek not the narrow way, but the real one is that they have no heart for it. As a fish is out of its native element when brought from the water and placed on the land, so the unregenerate have no relish for godliness. None but those who have communicated to them a new nature will desire to tread the highway of holiness.

"Because strait [or "narrow"] is the gate." We have already pondered this expression in the preceding article, yet so little is it understood and so much is it contradicted by the claptrap evangelism of our day that a further word on it is called for. Place by the side of it another of our Lord's sayings: "That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom!" (Matthew 19:23). How far removed is that from the idea now so prevalent! Do not thousands who take the lead in tract distribution, open-air work, Gospel hall and mission hall services, suppose it is just as easy for a rich man to be saved as a poor one, seeing that all which either of them has to do is "simply believe the record which God has given of His Son." Ah, my reader, the devils believe the whole of that record (Jas. 2:19): believe in His deity (Matthew 8:29), His virgin birth, His atoning death, His triumphant resurrection, but does their belief make them any less devilish in character? So of the vast majority of those who profess to have received Christ as their personal Saviour; has their believing of the Gospel made them less carnal and worldly, more truthful with their fellows, more honest in their business dealings, less selfish; if it has not, what is such "believing" worth? Less than nothing.

If saving faith were nothing but an act of the mind, an assent to the Divine testimony, then it would be just as easy for a millionaire to be saved as a pauper. But it is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10) and the heart is the seat of the affections, and how can a person hate what he loves or love what he hates? Can he do so by a mere "act of the will"? Of course not: It is contrary to nature. A miracle of grace has to be performed within him first, his heart must be "renewed," radically changed, before its affections will move in a different direction. We are told that "the disciples were astonished at His words," so they too were laboring

under the delusion that salvation was a simple matter for anybody. "But Jesus answered again and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" Faith is an attitude of heart Godward, and where material wealth is made the heart's sufficiency in connection with temporal supplies, how can it reverse its entire trend and trust God for spiritual and eternal things?

"It is easier [continued Christ] for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Now face the issue frankly, dear reader: does that declaration of the Lord Jesus denote that salvation is to be obtained cheaply, that anyone may be saved any time he is willing to be? Should it be answered, This is not a "salvation" passage, we reply, It most certainly is, for the disciples at once asked, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). To which our Lord said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible." How utterly erroneous then is the teaching that the matter of his salvation rests entirely with man's will. They are deceivers of souls, blind leaders of the blind, who go around telling the ignorant and unwary that getting saved is an easy and simple thing. Not so, it is the most difficult thing of all; nay, with men it is impossible, and the sooner this be recognized the sooner we are likely to get down on our knees and cry to God in earnest for the supernatural operations of His Spirit.

Trusting in riches is far from being the only thing which hinders man from seeking God's salvation. "How can ye believe," said Christ on another occasion, "which receive honour one of another and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44): the love of fame, seeking the approbation of our fellows, is another fatal obstruction. If the first three Gospels be read attentively (John's Gospel is for Christians—1:16) it will be seen that the Lord Jesus was very far from teaching that the attainment of heaven is a simple matter. He insisted that right eyes have to be plucked out (cherished lusts mortified) and right hands cut off (beloved idols destroyed)—Matthew 5:29, 30. He likened the Christian unto a "house" which has

to withstand "floods" and "winds" beating upon it (Matthew 7:25). He declared that in order to be His disciple a man must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). Instead of promising His followers a smooth voyage through this world, He said, "If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?" (Matthew 10:25). Instead of teaching that a single and isolated act of faith was sufficient to secure heaven, He said, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Instead of seeking to rush men into believing, He bade them "sit down first and count the cost" (Luke 14:28).

The gate or entrance then is a "strait" one, for it will not admit those who are loaded with the weapons of rebellion against God, nor can they squeeze through who are walking arm in arm with the world. To enter that gate the heart has to be humbled, sinful pleasures have to be relinquished, worldly companions abandoned, Christ has to be received in all His offices. And mark it well, this "gate" is but the entrance, giving admittance to the one and only path which leadeth unto life. That path Christ described as a "narrow way," to intimate that it is no easier, wider or more pleasant than the gate itself. In 1 Thessalonians 3:4, the cognate term is rendered "suffer tribulation." It is not on flowery beds of ease that the pilgrim is conducted to the Father's house: rather does he have to force his way through briars and thorns which cut and tear the flesh. There is not one path for the Redeemer and another for the redeemed (John 10:4). His was a path of affliction and ours cannot be otherwise if we follow the example He has left us; and if we do not we shall not join Him on high.

"Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." As this way is entered by the heart's sincere acceptance of Christ's holy teaching, so it is traversed by the heart and life being constantly regulated thereby. They who tread this narrow way heed not the counsel of the ungodly (Ps. 1:2), lean not unto their own understanding (Prov. 3:5), and follow not "the customs of the people" (Jer. 10:3). Rather are the believer's thoughts formed by the Scriptures and his conduct

directed by its statutes, so that God's Word becomes to him in fact and experience "a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path." The narrow way is strictly marked and exactly defined in the Divine Charter, and along it the Christian must go without turning aside either to the right hand or the left (Prov. 4:27). When he meets with an enemy that enemy must be overcome, or he will be overcome by him. The going is strenuous and arduous, for the whole of it is uphill. Let anyone who thinks otherwise read Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and see if that deeply taught soul pictured pilgrim's course to the celestial city as all smooth sailing. Alas, that so much of the modern preaching is the very reverse of what is contained in that faithful and helpful work.

And why is the way such a "narrow" one? Because it is a single path, whereas the way of death is manifold, containing sundry avenues. Just as Truth is one, but error is a many-headed monster, so the highway of holiness is a single track in contrast with the numerous pavements in the broad road which leads to destruction. It is "narrow" because those on it are shut in by the Divine commands, which make all else forbidden territory. It is "narrow" because it excludes all fleshly license and lawless liberty. It is "narrow" because it can only be trodden by faith, and faith is not only opposed to sight but to sense, to self-will and self-pleasing. It is "narrow" because all other interests have to be subordinated to the pleasing of God. Thus it is a way of difficulty and displeasure to corrupt nature, for our lusts are impatient of any restraint. It is natural to be more concerned about the body than the soul, to be absorbed with things present rather than with things to come, and this natural tendency is fed by habit and custom: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23).

Walking along the narrow way denotes a steady perseverance in faith and obedience to God in Christ. It signifies the overcoming of all opposition and the rejecting of all temptations to turn off into what Bunyan terms "Bypath meadow." That narrow way must be followed

no matter how much it may militate against my worldly interests. Our minds, our affections, our wills, our speeches and actions have all to be brought within the compass of God's Holy Word, within the compass of both His Law and His Gospel. At ten fundamental points our liberty is circumscribed by the Law, nor is the Gospel any less strict. Our natural desire unto self-confidence and self-sufficiency, self-complacency and self-righteousness is sternly repressed by it. The duties which the Lord has enjoined must be discharged conscientiously and circumspectly. Bounds are prescribed to our thoughts and affections: though certain things be lawful yet they are not expedient, and if things indifferent be used immoderately we sin therein. Good works are to be performed from a holy principle, in a holy manner, and with a holy design, and any failure therein is sin, for sin is a "missing the mark."

The obedience of the Christian is very precise, for not only must the rule be strictly observed but the motive must be pure—the pleasing and glorifying of God. Even our prayers must be according to the Divine will or they are not answered. Those who walk thus are bound to be thought singular and peculiar. Their Lord has faithfully warned them beforehand, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not . . . the world hateth you" (John 15:18, 19). And mark it well my reader, it was not the profane and heathen world that hated Christ, but the professing and religious world, and so it is still. If by grace you are enable-I to tread the narrow way it will be church members, professing Christians, who will say, "Such strictness is not required. I cannot see why you wish to cut yourself from us." If you refuse to imitate their laxity, they will sneer at your "holy preciseness" and mock at such "out-of-date puritanism." Ah, journeying along the narrow way means swimming against the tide of popular opinion!

"Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life." By "life" is meant that glorious state of unclouded fellowship with God, the heart's being satisfied with Him, the realization of His unspeakable excellency and

the fullness of joy there is in His immediate presence. Even now the real Christian has the promise, yea, the earnest, of it, but life in its fullness, in its unalloyed blessedness, in its ineffable consummation is yet future, as is clear from its being placed over against "destruction." "And few there be that find it." So let not the saint be discouraged because he finds his path so unpopular and a lonely one: his Master declared it would be so. This is one of the surest indexes that he is on the right road. And why is it that so few "find" it? Because so few diligently seek it. The great crowd of religious professors imagine they are already on it, and therefore they heed not that word, "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein" (Jer. 6:16). We need to inquire for it. Where? In God's Word, and then follow it, putting into practice what we already know.

Even when a servant of God describes the narrow way to professing Christians they heed him not, but charge him with teaching salvation by works and bringing souls into bondage, knowing not that the Gospel is the handmaid of the Law and not its enemy (Rom. 3:31).

Saving faith not only trusts in Christ but follows Him. It not only believes God's promises but obeys His precepts. Saving faith is a fruitful thing, abounding in good works. It enables its possessor to endure trials, resist the Devil, and overcome the world (1 John 5:4). None tread the narrow way save those who make vital godliness their chief concern, the main business of life. Hence we see why it is that the vast majority of our fellow men and women, yea, and of professing Christians also, will fail to reach heaven: it is because they prefer sin to holiness, indulging the lusts of the flesh to walking according to the Scriptures, self to Christ, the world to God, the broad way to the narrow. They are unwilling to forsake their sins, destroy their idols, turn their backs on the world, and submit to Christ as Lord.

False Prophets:

Deniers of the Necessity of Holiness

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheeps clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Matthew 7:15

If there be any verse in Holy Writ where it is deeply important to observe (and heed!) its connection it is surely the one at which we have now arrived. It may appear to the casual reader that our Lord here began an entirely new subject, having little or no relation to what immediately precedes. It is true our present verse introduces a distinct section of His Sermon, yet it also bears directly on what He had just said. Having described most solemnly and searchingly the way of life, like a faithful Guide Christ went on to warn us against one of the chief impediments to walking in that way, namely false guides; those who under the pretence of offering us Divine directions therein will fatally deceive us if we give heed thereto. In every age, but never more so than in our own, multitudes of gullible souls have been allured into the broad road which leads to destruction by men professing to be teachers of the Truth and ministers of Christ, yet who had not His Spirit and who were none of His: blind leaders of the blind, who with their dupes fall into the ditch.

"Beware of false prophets." The force of this exhortation will be the better perceived if we take to heart what is found in the Old Testament thereon, bearing in mind that history has ever repeated itself since human nature is the same in all ages. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means" (Jer. 5:30, 31). "Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither

spake I unto them; they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought and the deceit of their heart" (Jer. 14:14) "I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness; they are all of them unto Me as Sodom. . . . Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you, they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23:14,16). "There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls, they have taken the treasure and precious things, they have made her many widows" (Ezek. 22:25). False prophets were one of the chief factors in the apostasy and destruction of Israel, and these passages are recorded for our admonition and warning.

It must not be supposed that such deceivers passed away with the ending of the Mosaic economy. The Lord Jesus and His apostles announced that there should be false teachers in this Christian dispensation. Christ declared that "many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many," yea, they would present such imposing credentials that "if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:11, 24). Paul, announced, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch" (Acts 20:29-31). And again he said, "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:17, 18). Peter foretold, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Pet. 2:1, 2). John gave warning, "believe not every spirit, but try the

spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Immediately after the parable of the Sower Christ declared, "His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" (Matthew 13:25), the one so closely resembling the other that He commanded, "Let both grow together until, the harvest," when it will be seen there is no corn in the ears of the deceitful tares. By placing those parables in juxtaposition the Lord Jesus exposed the method and order of His adversary. "As Jannes and Jambres [the magicians of Pharaoh] withstood Moses" (2 Tim. 3:8) by their imitating his miracles, so when God sends forth His servants to preach the Gospel the Devil soon after prompts his emissaries to proclaim "another gospel": when God speaks the Devil gives a mocking echo. Satan has found that he can work far more effectively by counterfeiting the Truth than by openly denying it, hence in every age "false prophets" have abounded, and therefore we should be neither surprised nor stumbled by their number or success in our own day. We fully agree with Andrew Fuller when he said, "As this word 'beware of false prophets' was designed for Christians of every age, the term rendered 'prophets' must here, as it often is elsewhere, be used of ordinary teachers."

"Beware of false prophets" signifies in this dispensation, Be on your guard against false teachers, heretical preachers. There are no longer any "prophets" in the strict and technical sense of the term, though there are a few of God's servants who in their gifts and special work approximate closely thereto. Those against whom we are here warned are men who have a false commission, never having been called of God to the service they engage in; they preach error, which is subversive of "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3); and the fruit they bear is a base imitation of the fruit of the Spirit. The chief identifying mark of the false prophets has ever been their saying, "Peace, peace," when there is none (Jer. 23:17; Micah 3:5; 1 Thess. 5:3). They heal the wounds of sinners slightly (Jer.

8:11) and daub "with untempered mortar" (Ezek. 8:14; 22:28). They prophesy "smooth things" (Isa. 30:10), inventing easy ways to heaven, pandering to corrupt nature. There is nothing in their preaching which searches the conscience and renders the empty professor uneasy, nothing which humbles and causes their hearers to mourn before God; but rather that which puffs up, makes them pleased with themselves and to rest content in a false assurance.

The general characteristic of "false prophets" is that they make vital godliness to be a less strict and easier thing than it actually is, more agreeable to fallen human nature, and thus they encourage the unregenerate to be satisfied with something which comes short of true grace. So the Pharisees did, notwithstanding all their strictness (Matthew 23:25). So the papists do, notwithstanding all their boasted austerities. So Arminians do, notwithstanding all their seeming zeal for good works. So the Antinomians do, notwithstanding their pretended superior light and joy, zeal and confidence. This is the common mark of all false teachers: rejecting the Divine way, they manufacture one to suit themselves, and however they may differ among themselves, they all agree to make the practice of piety and the Christian walk an easier thing than the Scriptures do, to offer salvation on cheaper terms, to make the gate wider and the way to heaven broader than did Christ and His apostles. It is this which explains the secret of their popularity: "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them" (1 John 4:5). But of such Christ warns his people to "beware," for they feed souls with poison and not with the pure milk of the Word.

"Which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." In those words Christ emphasized the danger of these false prophets: the character they assumed is well calculated to deceive the unwary. The Lord here alluded to a device employed by false prophets in former times who counterfeited the true servants of God by wearing their distinctive attire. Elijah, in regard to his garments, was called "a hairy man" (2 Kings 1:8), and therefore when

John the Baptist came "in the spirit and the power of Elias" (Luke 1:17) we are told that he "had his raiment of camel's hair" (Matthew 3:4). When then the agents of Satan posed as the true prophets they counterfeited their attire that they might more easily seduce the people, as is clear from Zechariah 13: 4, where Jehovah declared that a day would come when the prophet should be ashamed of the vision he had prophesied and should no more wear "a garment of hair to deceive." Thus by this evident reference Christ intimated the plausible pretences of the heretical teachers, the subterfuges which they would employ to conceal their real character and design, thereby stressing what dangerous persons they are and how urgent is the need for His people to be constantly on their guard against those who seek their destruction.

"Which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." They pose as being the very opposite of what they really are. They are agents of the evil one, yet claim to be the servants of the Holy One. Their place is on the outside, in the forests and mountains, yet. they intrude themselves within the fold. This intimates their great craftiness and seeming piety. People think they are teaching them the way to heaven, when in fact they are conducting them to hell. Often they are difficult to discover, for they "creep into houses and lead captive silly women" (2 Tim. 3:6), yea, even in apostolic times some of them successfully "crept in unawares" (Jude 4) into the assemblies of the saints. It was of such Paul wrote when he said, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Though their clothing be "sheep's," yet they have the fierceness and cruelty of wolves.

In addition to their subtlety and plausibility, frequently accompanied by a most winsome personality and an apparently saintly walk, there is a real danger of our being deceived by these false prophets and

receiving their erroneous teaching by virtue of the fact that there is that within the Christian himself which responds to and approves of their lies. How immeasurably this intensifies our peril! That which flatters is pleasing to the flesh; that which abases is distasteful. Paul complains of this very thing to the Corinthians. Some had evidently resented his plain speaking in the first epistle, wherein he had rebuked their sins, for in his second he wrote, "would to God ye could bear with me a little" (11:1). The Galatians first received the Gospel so gladly from him that they would have plucked out their eyes had that advantaged him (4:15), yet soon after they imbibed deadly error from the Judaizers, and when the apostle took them to task for this he had to ask them, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (v. 16). Thus it was with the multitudes in connection with our Saviour: acclaiming Him with their hosannas and less than a week later crying, "Away with Him, crucify Him," so fickle and treacherous is the human heart.

What point does this give to our Lord's command, "take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24). Corrupt nature is thoroughly in love with error and will more readily and eagerly receive false than true doctrine. Should any dispute our statement, we would refer them to "the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so"(Jer. 5:31). Said Christ unto the Jews, "because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not" (John 8:45): what a commentary on fallen human nature—had He preached lies they had promptly received Him. Alas, what is man: he will run greedily after something new and sensational, but is soon bored by the old story of the Gospel. How feeble is the Christian, how weak his faith, how fickle and unstable the moment he is left to himself. Peter, the most courageous and forward of the apostles in his profession, denied his Master when challenged by a maid. Even when given a heart to love the Truth, we still have "itching ears" for novelties and errors, as the Israelites welcomed the manna at first, but soon grew weary of it and lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt.

Real and urgent then is our need to heed this command, "Beware of false prophets."

It is time that we should now proceed to amplify the thought expressed in our opening paragraph. In the previous section of His Sermon Christ had contrasted the broad road and the many who tread it and the narrow way and the few who find it, adding immediately, "Beware of false prophets." Now the narrow way, which leads unto life, is the way of salvation, and therefore the warning given us must have respect to those who teach or present an erroneous way of salvation, thereby placing the souls of their listeners in imminent peril, for to accept their false teachings is fatal. Thus the tremendous importance of our present passage is at once apparent. As the verse quoted from 2 Peter tells us, it is nothing short of "damnable heresies" which these false prophets promulgate. It is about salvation matters they treat, but damnation is the end of those who receive their lies, unless God intervenes with a miracle of grace and disillusions their dupes, which very rarely happens. It therefore behooves each of us seriously to ask, Have I been deceived by these false prophets? Am I treading a way which "seemeth right" unto me but which God declares is the way of "death" (Prov. 14:12)? Yea, it behooves us sincerely and earnestly to beseech God to make it unmistakably clear to us which "way" we are really treading.

Now it is the duty of God's servants to provide help to exercised souls on this supremely important matter, to expose the lies of these "false prophets," to make plain the way of salvation. This may best be done by defining and showing the relation of good works unto salvation, for it is at this point more than any other that the emissaries of Satan have fatally deceived souls. The principal errors which have been advanced thereon may be summed up under these two heads: salvation by works, and salvation without works. Romanists have been the chief promulgators of the former, insisting that the good works of the Christian have a meritorious value which entitles him to heaven. Thereby they rob Christ of much of His glory, bringing in something of ours in addition to His blood and righteousness to

obtain acceptance with God. Romanists do not repudiate in toto either the grace of God or the redemption of Christ, but they nullify both by attributing saving efficacy unto the rites of their church, and the performances of the creature. Such an error is expressly repudiated by such scriptures as Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8 and 9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5.

Some of the propagators of the salvation-without-works error during the last century have assumed the garb of the orthodox and thereby obtained a hearing from many who had never listened to them had their real characters been suspected. They have gone to the opposite extreme and preached a "gospel" as far removed from the Truth as the Romish lie of salvation by works. They teach that while good works from Christians are certainly desirable yet they are not imperative, the absence of them involving merely the loss of certain "millennial" honours and not the missing of heaven itself. They have interpreted those words of Christ's "It is finished" in such a way as to lull multitudes of souls into a false peace, as though He wrought something at the Cross which renders it needless for sinners to repent, forsake their idols, renounce the world before they can be saved; that "nothing is required from them but their simple acceptance of Christ by faith;" that once they have "rested on His finished work"—no matter what their subsequent lives—they are "eternally secure." So widely has this fatal doctrine been received, so thoroughly have these "ravenous wolves" deceived the religious world by their "sheep's clothing," that with rare exceptions anyone who now denounces this deadly evil is to call down upon himself the charge of being a "Legalist" or "Judaizer."

Before we endeavour to show the place which good works have in connection with salvation, let us quote a few sentences from a brief article we wrote in this magazine some years ago. "It is finished: do those blessed words signify that Christ so satisfied the requirements of God's holiness that that holiness no longer has any real and pressing claims upon us? Did Christ 'magnify the Law and make it honourable' (Isa. 42:21) that we might be lawless? Did He fulfil all

righteousness to purchase for us an immunity from loving God with all our hearts and serving Him with all our faculties? Did Christ die in order to secure a Divine indulgence that we might live to please self? . . . Christ died not to make my sorrow for and hatred of sin useless. Christ died not to absolve me from the full discharge of my responsibilities unto God. Christ died not so that I might go on retaining the friendship and fellowship of the world. . . . The 'finished work' of Christ avails me nothing if my heart has not been broken by an agonizing consciousness of my sinfulness. It avails me nothing if I still love the world (1 John 2:15). It avails me nothing unless I am a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17)."

Since then salvation by works and salvation without works are equally opposed to God's way of salvation, what is the place or relation which "good works" hold to the saving of a soul? Let us first define our terms. By "good works" we mean those operations of our hearts and hands which are performed in obedience to God's will, which proceed from evangelical principles and which have in view the Divine glory. By "salvation" we include not only regeneration (which is simply the beginning of it in our experience) but sanctification and an actual entrance into heaven itself. Thus "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10), unreserved surrender to the Lordship of Christ (Matthew 11:29; Luke 14:33), the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26; Heb. 5:9), enduring to the end in sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), love to God (Matthew 24:12, 13), and the way of holiness (Heb. 3:15) are all "good works" and are indispensably necessary if we are to escape the everlasting burnings. The good Shepherd "goeth before" His sheep (John 10:4) and if they are to join Him on high they must "follow Him"—"leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). There is no reaching heaven except by treading the only path that leads there—the highway of holiness.

The subject we are now dealing with is far too important to be condensed into a few brief and general statements, therefore, as our present space is almost exhausted, we shall conclude with this

paragraph and enter into more detail in our next chapter. That good works are neither the chief nor the procuring cause of salvation is readily admitted, but that they are no cause whatever, that they are simply "fruits" of salvation and not a means thereto, we as definitely deny. On the one hand good works must be kept strictly subordinate to the grace of God and the merits of Christ: on the other hand they must not be entirely excluded. It is the corn he sows which produces the crop, equally true that the fertility of the ground and the showers and sunshine from heaven are indispensable for a harvest; but given the finest seed, the richest soil, the most favorable season, would the farmer have anything to reap if he failed to plough his ground and sow his seed? But does that furnish room for the farmer to boast? Certainly not; who provided him with the seed and ground, who furnished him with health and strength, who granted the increase in his labours? Nevertheless, had he remained inactive there would be no crop.

False Prophets: Among the Orthodox

First a brief review of our last chapter. This warning against false prophets or preachers of error forms an appendage to our Lord's teaching on the "strait gate" and "narrow way" in verses 13 and 14. The danger from these false prophets appears in the character they assume—their "sheep's clothing" being thoroughly calculated to deceive the unwary. They are to be found in the circles of "the most orthodox" and pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation. It is because there has been so little instruction upon the relation of good

works to salvation that people fall such easy victims to these emissaries of Satan. At one extreme there are those (like the papists) who insist that salvation is procured by works, at the other extreme are those (boasting most loudly of their "soundness in the Faith") who affirm salvation may be secured without works, and rare indeed is it to find anyone today who occupies the middle and true position. That middle position shows that Divine grace does not set aside human responsibility, that the Gospel is no opposer of the Law, and that the "finished work" of Christ has not rendered unnecessary or non-imperative good works on the part of those who are to reach heaven.

Are good works necessary in order to the obtaining of salvation? We answer—and are satisfied the Scriptures warrant our so doing— no and yes. In order to solve that paradox or remove the seeming contradiction we must first define the "good works," then explain carefully what is meant by "necessary" and, last but not least, show what is connoted and included in "salvation." To some of our readers it may appear that entering into such details as these is really a waste of time, as well as rendering complex and difficult that which is really simple and easy. Such people would answer our opening inquiry with a plain and emphatic No, concluding nothing more was required. They would cite "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9), and say that ended the matter. Yet it is one thing to quote a passage and another thing to have a right understanding of its terms. Nevertheless, the language of Ephesians 2:8, 9, appears to be so unambiguous and decisive that there seems to be no need to enter upon a laborious study of the subject of which it treats. Why then do we insist upon pressing the inquiry any further?

Why? Because many of the saints are confused thereon and need to have expounded unto them "the way of God more perfectly." Why? Because there is a balance of Truth to be observed here as every-where, and if one half of it be ignored then the Truth is

perverted and souls are deceived. Why? Because it is at this very point that the "false prophets" get in most of their pernicious and destructive work, and unless we are forewarned we are not forearmed. Why? Because it is required of the Christian minister that he should declare "all the counsel of God" and not only favorite portions thereof. Why? Because if on the one hand the exaltation of good works to an unwarrantable place is to repudiate the grace of God, on the other hand the excluding of good works from the place Scripture assigns them is to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. Why? Because what the Word of God designates "good works" have well-nigh disappeared from Christendom and therefore there is an urgent need for pressing the same. Why? Because vast numbers of professing Christians are fatally deceived thereon, going down to hell with a "lie in their right hand."

The first answer we returned to the question, Are good works necessary in order to the obtaining of salvation? was No. Let us now proceed to explain and amplify. Most emphatically we affirm that no descendant of Adam can possibly perform any works which entitle him to God's favorable regard. He can no more merit heaven by his own performances than he could create a world. Sooner might the sinner build a ladder which would obtain for him access to the dwelling place of the Most High than he could do any deeds of charity which earned for him an eternity of bliss. He enters this world a fallen and depraved creature and from earliest infancy he has defiled and befouled the garments of his soul: more readily than could he make white the skin of an Ethiopian than cleanse his garments from their stains without having recourse to the blood of Christ. Turning over a new leaf will not erase the blots on the previous pages: if I could live sinlessly today that would not cancel the guilt of yesterday. I am a ten-thousand-talents debtor to God and have not a penny with which to discharge it, and therefore unless His sovereign grace takes pity upon me and gives me everything for nothing there is no hope whatever for me.

No doubt all of our readers would subscribe heartily unto the last paragraph, saying, That is just what I believe; and possibly a few would add: I trust you will not bring in something further that jars against it. Ah, suppose we were writing upon the righteousness of God, and dwelt on His equity and justice. How glorious the contrast between the Lord and most of earth's potentates and authorities: they can be bribed or influenced unto dishonesty, but God is no respecter of persons, giving to each his due, ever doing that which is right. But then I must point out that pertains to His office as Judge and His administration of the Law; but He is also sovereign and distributes His favors as He pleases, bestowing a single talent upon one, two on another, and yet five on another. At once the Arminian protests and says I have contradicted myself. Or, suppose I wrote upon the wondrous mercy and love of God, as displayed in creation, in providence and in grace: that His goodness and loving kindness are manifested on every side. But I must also point out that God is holy and hates sin, and will yet consign to the everlasting burnings all who continue defying Him; and at once the Universalist says, Now you have spoilt the whole thing. Probably some will bring the same charge against the remainder of this chapter.

Above we have said that the language of Ephesians 2:8, 9, appears to be so unambiguous and decisive that there seems to be no need to enter upon a critical examination of its terms—the same may be said of John 3:16, with like disastrous consequences. Every verse of Scripture requires prayerful and careful consideration, without which no man may expect rightly to apprehend it. "By grace are ye saved" does not stand alone as an absolute statement, but is immediately qualified by the clause "through faith," and thus the salvation there referred to is no more extensive than what is received through faith. This at once shows that "saved" is not used in this verse in its widest latitude. Faith itself is a part of God's "so-great salvation," yet faith is not received "through faith." Regeneration is also an essential part of salvation, yet so far from its coming to us through faith, faith is impossible till the soul is born again, Divinely quickened. Again, observe the restriction "by grace are ye saved," not

"by grace are ye and shall ye be saved through faith." The tense of the verb necessarily limits the salvation here contemplated to that which the believer is in present enjoyment of—it does not include his future glorification and entrance into heaven itself.

What has just been pointed out evidences the importance of showing what is connoted and included by the word "saved" or "salvation." First it should be pointed out that it is not used with one uniform sense and scope throughout the New Testament; sometimes it is employed with a wider signification, at others with a narrower. For instance, when we read, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth" (2 Thess. 2:13), the term "salvation" is to be understood in its widest latitude as comprehending all the benefits which pertain to redemption, all the gracious works of God toward and within us. But when we read, "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9), the word "saved" must be regarded in a more restricted sense, for it is distinguished from our effectual call.

"Salvation" is both relative and personal, legal and experimental, what God has done for His people and what He works in them: the former takes in election, adoption, justification, acceptance in the Beloved; the latter embraces their regeneration, sanctification, preservation, and glorification.

As we must not confound what God has done for His people and what He is now doing in them, so we must distinguish between the Christian's having a right or title to salvation and his actual possession of salvation. Faith in Christ secures an interest in all the benefits of salvation, whether in this world or in the world to come, but it does not convey a present participation in all of them. There is a salvation "in hope" (Rom. 8:24), which is a legal right to that which is yet future in realization: and there is a salvation which is "obtained" now (2 Tim. 2:10). There are certain benefits which the

believer has not only a title to, but which he as fully possesses now as he will in the future; such is his justification: he is as righteous now in the sight of the Divine Judge as he will be in heaven, only then there will be a fuller enjoyment of it. Even now we are "the sons of God," but it is not yet made manifest all that favour carries with it (1 John 3:2). Perfect sanctification is prepared by grace in election from all eternity, yet none of the elect now on earth are fully sanctified in their experience. Thus we must distinguish between what is the believer's by title and that which is accomplished by degrees and made good to him in time.

Once more, we must learn to distinguish sharply between the various causes and means of salvation. The original cause is the sovereign will of God, for nothing can come into being save that which He decreed before the foundation of the world. The meritorious cause is the mediatorial work of Christ, who "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:22) for His people, purchasing for them all the blessings of it by His perfect obedience to the Law and His sacrificial death. The efficient cause is the varied operations of the Holy Spirit, who applies to the elect the benefits purchased by Christ, capacitating them to enjoy the same and making them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. The ministerial cause and means is the preaching of the Word (Jas. 1:21), because it discovers to us where salvation is to be obtained. The instrumental cause is faith, by which the soul receives or comes into possession of and obtains an interest in Christ and His redemption. Such distinctions as these are not merely technicalities for theologians, but are part of the faith once delivered unto the saints, and unless they apprehend the same they are liable to be deceived by any Scripture-quoting false prophet who accosts them.

The Christian's title to salvation, that is to salvation as a whole and complete as it lay in the womb of God's decree, is entirely by grace, for he has done and can do nothing whatever to earn the same. We are not saved for our faith, for since it also is the gift of God, wrought in us by the Spirit, it possesses no meritorious worth. We are saved

by grace through faith because faith let in salvation, being the hand which receives it. Yet there is no salvation without faith: no one is saved until he believes. It is by grace through faith that we obtain deliverance from the curse of the Law and receive title to everlasting life and righteousness. As Thomas Goodwin pointed out in his masterly exposition of Ephesians 2:8: "We are saved through faith as that which gives us the present right, or that which God doth give us as a Judge, when we believe, before faith hath done a whit of works; but we are led through sanctification and good works to the possession of salvation." It must not be lost sight of that Ephesians 2:8, 9, is at once followed by, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It is sometimes said, because God has ordained it we shall walk in good works. That is true, but it is equally true that we must do so if heaven is to be reached.

Are good works necessary in order to the obtaining of salvation? Our answer was no and yes. Perhaps the reader is now better prepared to follow us in such a seemingly paradoxical answer. Certainly no works are required from us in order to induce God to show us favour. Nor are they necessary in order to our justification, for they constitute no part of that righteousness which we have before God. Nor do they procure for us a title to heaven. But it is a great mistake to suppose that because good works are not necessary for one particular end they are not indispensable for any: that because they are not meritorious therefore they are useless. Not so. Good works are necessary. They are necessary in order to preserve us from that course and practice which conducts to hell. They are necessary in order to the glorifying of God and the magnifying of His grace. They are necessary in order to keep us in the only way that leads to heaven. They are necessary in order to communion with the thrice holy God. They are necessary in order to prove the quality of our faith and the genuineness of our profession. They are necessary in order to the making of our calling and election sure. They are necessary in order to silence the detractors of the Gospel.

As there is no pardon until we forsake our wicked ways (Isa. 55:7), no blotting out of our sins until we repent and turn unto God (Acts 3:19), so there is no entering into life except by treading the only way that leads thereto, and that is the path of obedience. So long as the Christian remains in this world he is in the place of danger: deliverance from hell is only the beginning of salvation, nor is it completed until heaven is reached. Between justification and glorification there is a fight to be fought, enemies to be conquered, a victory to be won, and the prize is only for the victor. "Conversion is a turning into the right road; the next thing is to walk in it. The daily going on in that road is as essential as the first starting if you would reach the desired end. To strike the first blow is not all the battle: to him that overcometh the crown is promised. To start in the race is nothing, many have done that who have failed; but to hold out till you reach the winning post is the great point of the matter. Perseverance is as necessary to a man's salvation as conversion" (C.

H. Spurgeon).

In what sense are good works "necessary" unto salvation—necessary in order to final and complete salvation? First, they are requisite as the way in which that final salvation is attained. As a destination cannot be reached without journeying thither, neither can life be entered except through the strait gate and treading the narrow way: it is via the path of holiness that heaven is reached. Second, they are requisite as part of the means which God has appointed: they are the means of spiritual preservation. The only alternative to good works is evil ones, and evil works slay their perpetrator—sin is destructive: "if ye live after the flesh ye shall die" (Rom. 8:13; and cf. Gal. 6:8). Third, they are requisite as a condition of the possession of full salvation. Not a condition like a stipulation in a bargain, but as a connection between two things. As food must be eaten for the body to be nourished, as seed must be sown in order to a harvest, so obedience, equally as repentance and faith, precede the crowning. Fourth, as an evidence of the genuineness of faith: the fruit must manifest the tree.

Those who deny that good works are in any sense necessary to salvation appeal to the instance of the thief on the cross, arguing that in his case there was nothing more than a simple and single look of faith unto the Saviour. We might dispose of such an appeal by pointing out that his case is quite exceptional—for it is very rarely that God at once removes to heaven him who believes—and that it is not permissible to frame a rule from an exception. Instead, we meet the objector on his own ground and show that his assertion is erroneous. There was far more than a bare looking to the Saviour in his case. (1) He rebuked his companion: "Dost not thou fear God?" (Luke 23:40). (2) He repented of his sins: "we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (v. 41)—he condemned himself, owning that death was his due. (3) He bore public witness to Christ's sinlessness: "this man hath done nothing amiss." (4) In the face of a hostile mob, he testified to Christ's Lordship and Kingship: "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

In his sermon on Ephesians 2:10, Manton says: "Our well-doing is the effect of salvation if you take it for our first recovery to God, but if you take it for full salvation or our final deliverance from all evil, good works go before it indeed, but in a way of order, not of meritorious influence. To think them altogether unnecessary would too much deprecate and lessen their presence or concurrence; to think they deserve it would too much exalt and advance them beyond the line of their due worth and value. The apostle steered a middle course between both extremes. They are necessary but not meritorious. They go before eternal life not as a cause but as a way. Let us now summarize it thus: God has made promise of salvation unto His people: Christ has purchased it for them: faith obtains title thereto: good works secure actual admission into the full and final benefits of redemption, and in order to empower the Spirit renews the believer day by day."

True and False Prophets Contrasted

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."
Matthew 7:15-20

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (v. 15). No idle or needless warning was this, but one which should be seriously taken to heart by all who have any concern for the glory of God or value their eternal interests. Our danger is real and pressing, for "false prophets" are not few in number but "many" (1 John 4:1), and instead of being found only in the notoriously heretical sects, have "crept in" among saints until they now dominate nearly all the centers of orthodoxy. If we are deceived by them and imbibe their lies the result is almost certain to be fatal, for error acts upon the soul as deadly poison does on the body. The very fact that these impostors assume "sheep's clothing" and pose as the servants of Christ greatly increases the peril of the unwary and unsuspecting. For these reasons it is imperative that we should be on our guard. But to be properly on our guard requires that we should be informed, that we should know how to recognize these deceivers. Nor has our Lord left us unfurnished at this vital point, as the succeeding verses show.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits." Three questions are suggested by this statement, to which it is necessary for us to obtain correct answers if this rule here laid down by Christ is to be used by us to good advantage. First, what sort of knowledge is it that is mentioned? Is it relative or absolute? Is it the forming of a credible

and reliable judgment of the teachers we sit under and whose writings we peruse, or is it an unerring discernment which precludes us from making any mistake? Second, how is this knowledge obtained? Is it a Divine endowment or a human acquirement? Is it one of the spiritual gifts which accompanies regeneration, a sense of spiritual perception bestowed upon the Christian, or is it something after which we must labour, which can be procured only by our own diligence and industry? Third, what are the "fruits" brought forth by the false prophets? Are they their character and conduct, or is something else intended? Really, it is this third question which is the principal one to be pondered, but we will say a little upon the first two before taking it up.

The answer to the first question should be fairly obvious, for even in this day of human deification we have heard of none laying claim to infallibility except the arch-humbug at Rome. But though the knowledge here predicated be not an inerrant one, yet it is something much superior to a vague and uncertain one. In those words our Lord lays down a rule, and like all general rules we may make mistakes— both favorable and unfavorable—in the application of it. The knowledge which Christ here attributes to His people is such a persuasion as to inform them how they should act toward those who appear before them as preachers and teachers, enabling them to test their claims and weigh their messages. Though it does not always enable its possessor to penetrate the disguise worn by impostors, yet it is sufficient to arouse his suspicion and, if acted on, to preserve him from falling a prey to deceivers. It is a knowledge which fortifies the Christian from being beguiled by religious seducers.

And how is this knowledge procured? It is both obtained and attained: obtained from God, attained by practice. Spiritual discernment is one of the accompaniments of the new birth: necessarily so, for regeneration is a being brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light. In that light the Christian is able to perceive things which previously were hidden from him, yet he must perforce walk with Him who is light if he is not to recede into the

shadows. There are degrees of light, and the measure of our spiritual illumination decreases as distance increases between us and "the Sun of righteousness." Moreover, sight is as essential as light for clear vision. The faculty of spiritual perception belongs to each soul renewed by the Spirit, yet faculties unemployed soon become useless to their possessors. When the apostle was contrasting unhealthy saints with the healthy (Heb. 5:11-14) he described the latter as "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The more we walk in the light and the more we exercise our spiritual faculties, the more readily shall we perceive the snares and stumbling stones in our path.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits." False prophets are to be identified by what they produce. By their "fruits" we understand, principally, their creed, their character, and their converts. Is it not by these three things that we recognize the true prophets? The genuine servants of God give evidence of their Divine commission by the doctrine they proclaim: their preaching is in full accord with the Word of Truth. The general tenor of their lives is in harmony therewith, so that their daily walk is an example of practical godliness. Those whom the Spirit quickens and edifies under their preaching bear the features of their ministerial fathers and follow the lead of their shepherds. Conversely, the ministers of Satan, though feigning to be the champions of the Truth, oppose and corrupt it: some by denying its Divine authority, some by mingling human tradition with it, others by wresting it or by withholding vital portions thereof. Though their outward conduct is often beyond reproach, yet their inward character, the spirit which actuates them, is that of the wolf—sly, cruel, fierce. And their converts or disciples are like unto them.

The true prophet accords God His rightful place. He is owned as the King of kings and Lord of lords, as the One who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." He is acknowledged to be the sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, at whose disposal are all creatures and all events, for whose pleasure they are created (Rev.

4:11), whose will is invincible and whose power is irresistible. He is declared to be God in fact as well as in name: One whose claims upon us are paramount and incontestable, One who is to be held in the utmost reverence and awe, One who is to be served with fear and rejoiced in with trembling (Ps. 2:11). Such a God the false prophets neither believe in nor preach. On the contrary, they prate about a God who wants to do this and who would like to do that, but cannot because His creatures will not permit it. Having endowed man with a free will, he must neither be compelled nor coerced, and while Deity is filled with amiable intentions He is unable to carry them out. Man is the architect of his fortunes and the decider of his own destiny, and God a mere Spectator.

The true prophet gives Christ His rightful place, which is very much more than to be sound concerning His person. Romanists are more orthodox about the deity and humanity of Christ than are multitudes of Protestants, yet the former as much as the latter are grossly heterodox upon His official status. The true prophet proclaims the Lord Jesus as the covenant Head of His people, who was set up before the foundation of the world to fulfil all the terms of the covenant of grace on their behalf and to secure for them all its blessings. He sets forth Christ as the "Surety" and "Mediator" of the covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6), as the One who came here to fulfil His covenant engagements: "Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God"—it was a voluntary act, yet in discharge of a sacred agreement. All that Christ did here upon earth and that which He is now doing in heaven was and is the working out of an eternal compact. Every thing relating to the Church's salvation was planned and settled by covenant stipulation between the Eternal Three. Nothing was left to chance, nothing remained uncertain, nothing was rendered contingent upon anything the creature must do. About this glorious and fundamental truth the false prophets are completely silent.

It was to fit Him for His covenant engagements that the Surety became incarnate. It was to redeem His people from the curse of the Law that Christ was made under it, fulfilled its terms, endured its

penalty in the room and stead of His covenant people. It was for them, and no others, that He shed His precious blood. Because He faithfully and perfectly discharged His covenant obligations, the Father has sworn with an oath that all for whom He acted shall be eternally saved, that not one of these shall perish, solemnly declaring that "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). God has made with Christ, and His people in Hint, "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure"(2 Sam. 23:5). But the false prophets reverse all this. They misrepresent the redemptive work of Christ as being a vague, indefinite, general, promiscuous thing, rendering nothing sure. They believe Christ shed His blood for Judas equally with Peter, and for Pilate as truly as Paul. They preach a salvation which is uncertain and contingent, as though it were for anybody or nobody as the caprice of men shall decide: Christ provided it and if we accept of it well and good; if not, He will be disappointed.

The true prophet puts man in his proper place. He declares that man is a depraved, ruined and lost creature, dead in trespasses and sins. He points out that man is alienated from God, that his mind is enmity against Him, that he is an inveterate rebel against Him. He shows this to be true not only of those in heathendom, but equally so of those born in Christendom: that "There is none righteous, no not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:10, 11). He makes it clear that man is a total wreck, that no part of his being has escaped the fearful consequences of his original revolt from his Maker: that his understanding is darkened, his affections corrupted, his will enslaved. Because of what transpired in Eden man has become the slave of sin and the captive of the Devil. He has no love for the true and living God, but instead a heart that is filled with hatred against Him; so far from desiring or seeking after Him, he endeavors by every imaginable means to banish Him from his thoughts. He is blind to His excellency, deaf to His voice, defiant of His authority and unconcerned for His glory.

The true prophet goes still farther. He not only portrays the sinner as he actually is, but he announces that man is utterly unable to change himself or better his condition one iota. He solemnly announces man to be "without strength," that he cannot bring himself into subjection to the Divine Law or perform a single action pleasing to God (Rom. 8:7, 8). He insists that the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots more readily than they who are accustomed to do evil can perform that which is good (Jer. 13:1, 23). In short, he declares that man is hopelessly and irremediably lost unless a sovereign God is pleased to perform a miracle of grace upon him. But it is the very opposite with the false prophets. They speak "smooth things" and flatter their hearers, persuading them that their case is very far from being as desperate as it really is. If they do not expressly repudiate the Fall, or term it (as the Evolutionists) a "fall upward," they greatly minimize it, making it appear to be only a slight accident which may be repaired by our own exertions, that man is little affected by it, that he still has "the power to accept Christ."

According as the fall of man be viewed and preached so will be the conceptions of men concerning the need and nature of redemption. Almost every Gospel truth will necessarily be colored by the light in which we view the extent of the fall. Take the truth of election: which is the deciding factor—God's will or mine? Why, if I be in possession of freedom of will and am now on probation, everything must turn on the use I make of this all-important endowment. But can this be made to square with the Scriptures? Yes, by a little wresting of them. It is true that false prophets hate the very word "election," but if they are pressed into a corner they will try and wriggle out of it by saying that those whom God elected unto salvation are the ones whom He foreknew would be willing to accept Christ, and that explanation satisfies ninety-nine per cent of their hearers. The truth is God foreknew that if He left men to their pleasure none would ever accept Christ (Rom. 9:29), and therefore He made sovereign and unconditional selection from among them. Had not God eternally chosen me, I certainly had never chosen Him.

The same holds true of regeneration. If the sinner be spiritually impotent and his case hopeless so far as all self-effort and help are concerned, then he can no more quicken himself than can a rotten corpse in the tomb. A dead man is powerless, and that is precisely the natural condition of every member of the human race, religious and irreligious alike: "dead in trespasses and sins." The individual concerned in it contributes no more to his new birth than he did to his first. This was expressly insisted upon by Christ when He declared: "which were born not of blood [by descent from godly parents], nor of the will of the flesh [by their own volition], nor of the will of man [by a persuasive preacher], but of God" (John 1:13). There must be an act of Divine creation before anyone is made a new creature in Christ. But the false prophets represent man to be merely "bruised" or at most crippled by the fall, and insist that he may be born again simply by accepting Christ as his personal Saviour—a thing which none can do until he is brought from death unto life.

The genuine prophet trumpets forth with no uncertain sound the grand truth of justification. Rightly did Luther declare that "Justification by faith is the doctrine of a standing or falling church," for those who pervert it corrupt the Gospel at its very heart. In view of man's fallen and depraved condition, in view of his being a transgressor of the Divine Law, lying beneath its awful condemnation, the question was asked of old, "How then can man be justified with God?" (Job 25:4). To be "justified" is very much more than being pardoned: it is the declaration by the Divine Judge that the believer is righteous, and therefore entitled to the reward of the Law, but how is this possible when man has no righteousness of his own and is totally unable to produce any? The answer is that Christ not only bore in His own body the sins of God's elect, but He rendered to the Law a perfect obedience in their stead, and the moment they believe in Him His obedience is reckoned to their account, so that each can say, "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). But the false prophets deny and ridicule this basic truth of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The true prophet gives the Holy Spirit His rightful place, not only in the Godhead, as co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Son, but in connection with salvation. Salvation is the gift of the Triune God: the Father planned it, the Son purchased it, the Spirit communicates it. The genuine servant of God is very explicit in declaring that the work of the Holy Spirit is as indispensable as the work of Christ: the One serving for His people, the Other acting in them. It is the distinctive office of the Spirit to illumine the understanding of God's elect, to search their conscience and convict of their ruined and guilty condition. It is His office to work repentance in them, to communicate faith unto them, to draw out their hearts unto Christ. The soundest and most faithful preaching in the world will avail nothing else unless the Holy Spirit applies iii in quickening power; the most winsome offers and persuasive appeals will be useless until the Spirit bestows the hearing ear. The true prophet knows this, and therefore has he no confidence in his own abilities, but humbly seeks and earnestly prays for the power of the Spirit to rest upon him. But how different is it with deceivers of souls!

The genuine servant of God not only realizes the truth of that word, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6) in connection with the fruitage of his labours, but he is also deeply conscious of his own need of being personally taught by the Spirit. He has been made to feel his utter insufficiency to handle sacred things, and to realize that if he is to enter into the spiritual meaning of the Word he must be Divinely taught in his own soul. A mere intellectual study of the letter of Scripture cannot satisfy one who longs for a deeper experimental knowledge of the Truth, nor will he be contented with simply informing the minds of his hearers. As it is a tender conscience and a fuller heart-acquaintance with God and His Christ that he covets for himself, so it is to the conscience and heart of his hearers that he addresses himself. It is the opposite with the false prophets: they are occupied solely with the letter of Scripture, with outward profession: there is no deep probing,

nothing searching in their messages, nothing to disturb the religious worldling.

Another mark by which many of the false prophets may be recognized is the disproportionate place they give to prophecy in their preaching and teaching. This has ever been a favorite device of religious charlatans, as those versed in ecclesiastical history are well aware. Nor should any observer of human nature be surprised at this. God has placed an impenetrable veil upon the future, so that none can know "what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1). But man is intensely curious about coming events and gives a ready ear to any who pretend to be able to enlighten him. If on the one hand the irreligious will flock to palmists, astrologers and other fortune-tellers, the religious will crowd around anyone who claims to be able to explain the mysterious contents of the Apocalypse. In times of war and national calamity the curious are easily beguiled by men with charts on the book of Daniel. The express prohibition of our Lord, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons" (Acts 1:7), should deter His people from giving ear to those who claim to have "light" thereon.

In this chapter we have not dealt with false prophets generally, but have confined ourselves to those who wear "sheep's clothing," whose attacks are made upon the flock of Christ. These are men who boast of their soundness in the Faith, and obtain a hearing among those who regard themselves as the cream of orthodoxy. Thus far we have dwelt upon their creed, on what they believe and teach: in our next we shall describe some of the distinguishing traits of their characters, and then point out that the type of converts they make also serves to identify them by the "fruit" they produce. Our design in entering into such detail is that young Christians may be furnished with a full-length photo of these deceivers, and to make it clear that we are not condemning such because they differ from us on one or two minor matters, but because they are thoroughly corrupt in doctrine. Furthermore, in all that has been before us it should be clear that we should labour diligently to become thoroughly acquainted with God's

Word for ourselves—or how shall we be fitted to detect these seducers of souls? Ponder Acts 17:11.

False Prophets - Concluded

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."
Matthew 7:15-20

During the days of His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus furnished full proof that He was the perfect Preacher as well as the model Man. That fact has not received the attention which it deserves, especially among those responsible for training the future occupants of our pulpits. We have perused numerous works on homiletics, but never came across one which attempted to analyze and summarize the methods followed by Christ in His public and private discourses. If the believer finds it necessary and beneficial to ponder the prayers of the Saviour in order that his devotional life may be directed and enriched thereby, surely the minister of the Gospel should feel it both essential and helpful to make a close study of how He approached and addressed both sinners and saints. If he does so he will discover the use Christ made of the Scriptures, the wealth of illustration He drew from the simplest objects of nature, the particular aspects of

Truth on which He threw the most emphasis, the variety of motives to which He appealed, the different parts of man's complex constitution to which He addressed Himself, the repetitions He deemed needful, the searching questions He so often asked, the homely comparisons He made, and the sharp contrasts He drew.

Even if the student confines his attention to the Sermon on the Mount he will perceive how wide was the range of this single Address, how numerous were the themes covered, how diverse the characters dealt with, and thus how many-sided is the work of the ministry. First the Lord depicted those upon whom the benediction of God rests, describing them according to their character and conduct. Next He defined the function and purpose of His servants:

they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Then He declared His attitude unto the Law and the prophets and inculcated the basic law of His kingdom (5:20). Next He expounded the spirituality of the Law and showed it demands conformity of heart as well as of action, displaying the high and holy standard which God will in no wise lower. This was followed by a warning against hypocrisy, especially in connection with prayer and fasting. Treasures in heaven were contrasted with those on earth, and the futility of seeking to serve two masters shown. Expostulation was made against covetousness and carking care. The subject of judging others was opened up, spiritual ambition encouraged, and the golden rule enunciated. The ways of death and of life were faithfully drawn.

This brief summary brings us to our present passage, which opens with a solemn warning. It is not sufficient to enforce the Law and expound the Gospel. Nor has the pulpit completed its task by setting before believers their various duties and calling to the discharge thereof. There are enemies to be warned against. Doubtless it is a far more delightful task to expatiate upon the riches of Divine grace and the excellencies and glories of the Redeemer; but there are also other matters which need attention. If the example of Christ and His apostles is to be followed the saints are to be put on their guard

against those who would seduce them, who with "cunning craftiness. . . lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14). Salvation is obtained by coming to the knowledge of the Truth (1 Tim. 2:4), and they who are deluded into believing a lie shall be damned (2 Thess. 2:11, 12). The very fact that eternal destiny is involved by what we believe is sufficient to show the deep seriousness of the issue here raised. He who has the care of souls must spare no pains in sounding the alarm.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (v. 15). Herein we behold their "cunning craftiness." They do not appear in their true colors but are cleverly disguised. They pose as true friends of the Lord's people when in reality they are their deadliest foes. They proclaim themselves to be genuine Christians, whereas in reality they are the emissaries of Satan. They feign themselves to be the teachers of the Truth, but their aim is to instill falsehoods. They work not outside in the profane world, but among the assemblies of the saints, pretending to be deeply taught of God, the champions of orthodoxy, men filled with love, earnestly seeking the good of souls. Beware of them, says the great Shepherd of the sheep, for inwardly they are ravening wolves—fierce, merciless, seeking the destruction of the flock. Let that fact alarm you, arouse you to your danger and make you vigilant in guarding against it. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed upon.

And what is the best course to take in order to heed this solemn warning? What is the wisest policy to follow so as to be safeguarded from these murderers of souls? How shall we obtain the needed wisdom that we may be enabled to detect and identify these subtle dissemblers? Vitally important is it that we should obtain right answers to these questions. First, let us duly note the place where this warning occurs in our Lord's sermon. It is found not at the beginning but near its close. Is there not both instruction and comfort in that? Does it not intimate that if we have really taken to heart Christ's teaching in the former sections we shall be fortified against the danger He here warns against? That if we earnestly heed

His preceding exhortations, that if we diligently seek to cultivate inward holiness and endeavour to walk according to the rules given by our Master, that if we ourselves have a personal and experimental knowledge of what it is to be a real disciple of His, then we shall have little difficulty in recognizing the false ones?

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (6:22). That clearly states the principle to which we have alluded above. Our Lord's language here is parabolic but its meaning is quite clear and simple. The activities of the body are directed according to the light received through the eye, and when that organ is sound and functioning properly, perceiving objects as they really are, the whole body is illuminated and enabled to discharge its duties, for we can then move with safety and circumspection. In like manner the faculties of the soul are principally directed by the dictates of the understanding, and where that is enlightened by the Holy Spirit and dominated by the Truth we shall be preserved from the snares of Satan and the stumbling-stones of the world. A "single eye" has but one object—God, the pleasing and glorifying of Him. "But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Thus the "single" eye is a holy one, being contrasted with that which is evil or carnal.

When the "eye" is occupied with Him who is Light, its possessor is able to distinguish between the things which differ and form a sound and right judgment both of persons and things. Our estimation of values is determined by whether our minds be Divinely illuminated or still in nature's darkness. Where the soul is regulated by the Truth it will be endowed with a wisdom which enables its possessor to distinguish between good and evil; the understanding then becomes a faculty which discerns between the genuine and the spurious. "Thou through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies" (Ps. 119:98). Habitual submission to the Divine authority brings its own reward in this life—part of which is a spiritual discretion which preserves from impostures. When the understanding is dominated by the Word the whole soul is "full of

light," so that all its faculties are under its beneficent influence: the conscience being informed, the affections turned to their legitimate object, the will moved in the right direction. In God's light we "see light" (Ps. 36:9), perceiving the difference between good and evil, the things to be sought and those to be avoided.

"If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). The fundamental condition for obtaining spiritual knowledge, discernment and assurance is a genuine determination to carry out the revealed will of God in our daily lives. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments" (Ps. 111:10). Capacity to distinguish Truth from error consists not in vigor of intellect nor in natural learning, but in a sincere willingness and earnest desire to yield ourselves unto the Divine will. Where there is a genuine subjection to the Divine authority and a deep longing to please the Lord, even though it appears to be directly against our temporal interests and worldly prospects, and even though it involves fierce opposition from enemies and ostracism by our professed friends, there will be both spiritual discernment and assurance. Where the heart puts the glory of God before everything else it will be raised above and delivered from the prejudices of pride, self-love, carnal fears, and fleshly aspirations which cloud and bias the understanding of the unregenerate. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3) is the sure promise.

Bagster's Interlinear gives a more literal translation of John vii, 17: "If any one desire His will to practice he shall know concerning the teaching, whether from God it is." The Greek word rendered "desire" signifies no fleeting impression or impulse but a deep-rooted determination. Certainty may be arrived at in connection with the things of God, but in order thereto the heart must first be right toward Him, that is surrendered to Him. Where there is a resolution to perform God's will at all costs, there will be a capacity and an enablement to discern and embrace the Truth and to detect and refuse error. It is the state of our souls which makes us receptive to or repellent against the temptations and lies of the enemy: when the

heart is yielded to God and conformed to His will, we have no difficulty in seeing through the deceits of Satan. It is those who are governed by self-will and devoted to self-pleasing who fall such easy victims to "seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). The Truth frees from deception, but only as the Truth is appropriated and assimilated.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits" (v. 16). Ah, but note well to whom this is said. The Lord does not predicate this of all who make a bare profession of faith: it is very far from being a knowledge common to all in Christendom. The "ye" is definitely restricted to God's own people, to those who have entered the strait gate and are walking in the narrow way of the immediate context, True, even they need to be on their guard, but if they give heed to this warning of Christ, as assuredly they will, they shall at once recognize these impostors. Ye shall know them: but none other will. It is because the sheep "follow" the good Shepherd that "they know His voice," and because they know His voice "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:14, 15). It is the obedient ear, and that only, which distinguishes between the voice of the true and the false shepherds. If the ear be attuned to the precepts of Scripture it will reject the sophistries of religious charlatans.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (vv. 16-20). In these words our Lord intimates that His people should have no difficulty in recognizing the false prophets: if they do but exercise ordinary precaution they will detect the imposture which is sought to be played upon them. The masqueraders are to be identified by their "fruits." At a distance trees look very much the same, but a closer inspection of them enables us to distinguish the fruitful from the

fruitless ones, and whether the fruit be wholesome or injurious. In like manner there needs to be a careful examination of those who appear before us as the servants of God, that the true ones may be distinguished from the counterfeit.

In the preceding chapter we suggested that there is a threefold reference in the "fruits" produced by the false prophets, namely their creed, their character, and their converts. Having dwelt therein at some length on the first, a few words now upon the second and third. The character of these men is clearly indicated by Christ's descriptive words: "inwardly they are ravening wolves." It was none other than the Lord of love who employed what this supercilious generation would term "harsh language." Love is faithful as well as gentle, and it was love to His own which moved Christ to tear off their disguise and reveal these enemies of His flock in their real character. He who denounced the scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites" and "blind guides," and termed Herod "that fox" (Luke 13:32), hesitated not to brand these subtle deceivers as "ravening wolves." When a bottle of deadly poison is placed among others containing healing lotions it needs to be plainly labeled.

That Christ here left an example for His servants to follow appears clearly from the instance of the apostle Paul. When taking leave of the elders of the Ephesian church, he warned them that "after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30). In that last clause we have another mark of the false prophets. They are inveterate proselytizers. They continually obtrude themselves upon people's attention. They are ever creeping into houses, "leading captive silly women led away with divers lusts." They are continually coaxing and wheedling folk to come to their meetings. But the true prophet never attempts guile or presses anyone to attend his services. No, he is content to follow his Master's practice: "he that hath ears to hear let him hear," and there he leaves it. When a place

receives them not they "go their way" (Luke 10:10) instead of pleading and arguing and seeking to draw disciples "after them."

"But inwardly they are ravening wolves." What a solemn but suggestive and revealing word is that. The wolf, like the fox, is tricky and treacherous, subtle and sly, hence the words "cunning craftiness" in connection with the purveyors of error who "lie in wait to deceive" of Ephesians 4:14. They scruple not to employ the most dishonorable tactics and resort to tricks which honest men of the world would scorn to use. The wolf is cruel and merciless: so are these deceivers of souls. They prate about love, but they are full of hatred toward those who expose them. They are greedy, having voracious appetites, and false prophets are men of insatiable ambition, hungry for applause, avaricious. Jeremiah 23:32, speaks of their "lightness" or irreverence, and Zephaniah 3:4, also says, "their prophets are light and treacherous." So far from being sober and solemn they are frivolous and frothy: it cannot be otherwise, for the fear of God is not upon them.

"By their fruits ye shall know them." Not by their profession, nor their sanctimoniousness, nor their zeal, but their "fruits" we understand; third, the converts they make. Like produces like. The parent is more or less reproduced in his children. In Jeremiah 23:16, it is said of those who give ear to the false prophets, "they make you vain." Egotistical themselves, their disciples are also conceited: proud of their letter-knowledge of the Scriptures, boastful of their orthodoxy, claiming to have light which those in the "man-made systems" are without. But their walk betrays them: no traces of humility, no mourning over sin, no experimental acquaintance with the plague of their hearts. They loudly boast of their assurance, but produce not the evidences on which scriptural assurance is based. They prate about eternal security but refuse to examine their hearts and see whether they be in the faith. They have much to say about their peace and joy, but are strangers to the groanings of Romans 7. They boast that they are "not under the law" and give proof thereof in their characters and conduct.

In conclusion let us anticipate a question: why does God permit these false prophets which work such havoc in Christendom? This is a very solemn question, and we must restrict ourselves to what the Scriptures say by way of reply. "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of the prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:3). From those words it is clear that God suffers teachers of error for the same reason as He does persecutors of His people: to test their love, to try their fidelity, to show that their loyalty to him is such that they will not give ear unto His enemies. Error has always been more popular than the Truth, for it lets down the bars and fosters fleshly indulgence, but for that very reason it is obnoxious to the godly. The one who by grace can say "I have chosen the way of Truth" will be able to add "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:30, 31), none being able to move him therefrom.

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19). Error serves as a flail, separating the chaff from the wheat. Let some plausible and popular preacher come forward with an old error decked out in new clothes and empty professors will at once flock to his standard; but not so with those who are established in the Faith. Thus, by means of the false prophets, God makes it appear who are the ones who hold the Truth in sincerity: they are faithful to Him despite all temptations to turn away unto a "broader-minded" way. The genuine gold endures every test to which it is subjected. Thus too are the unregenerate "converts" revealed: the counterfeit gold will not withstand the fire. Those who are attracted by a novelty do not wear but are soon carried away by some newer innovation. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). Thus, they who turn away from orthodoxy to heterodoxy must not be regarded as real Christians.

The false prophets are also ordained of God for the punishment of those who receive not the love of the Truth. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12). Ahab could not endure Elijah and Micaiah, the servants of God, therefore he was suffered to follow the priests of Baal unto his destruction.

It is very clear from Matthew 24:5, 11, etc., that Israel's rejection of Christ was followed by the appearing of many false christs in their midst who fatally deceived large numbers of the Jews. It was not until primitive and genuine Christianity had been jettisoned that the religious world was plagued by the monster of Romanism. A very large proportion of those found in the false cults of our day were once members of or regular attenders at churches which were more or less sound in the Faith. Beware, my reader, if you despise God's Truth you will fall into love with Satan's lies.

Profession Tested

"Not every one that saith Unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess Unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and heat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall he likened unto a foolish man, which built his

house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and heat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Matthew 7:21-27

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (v. 21). With these words our Lord commenced the twelfth and final division of this notable Sermon. It was perhaps the most searching and solemn section in it. Here the One who cannot be imposed upon by any deceit makes known His inexorable demand for reality. Here the One who shall yet officiate as the Judge of all the earth declares that at the Grand Assize all who have deceived themselves and deluded others will stand forth in their real characters. Here the One who knows every thought and imagination of the heart, before whose omniscient eye all things are naked and opened, makes it crystal clear that lip service is worthless and that even the most imposing deeds count for nothing where vital and practical godliness is lacking. The more this passage be thoughtfully pondered the less surprised are we that so many seek to get rid of this Sermon by terming it "Jewish" and insisting "it is not for this dispensation."

If it be true that Matthew 5-7 is more hated by our moderns than any other portion of God's Word, it is equally true that none is more urgently needed by them. Never were there so many millions of nominal Christians on earth as there are today, and never was there such a small percentage of real ones. Not since before the days of Luther and Calvin, when the great Reformation effected such a grand change for the better, has Christendom been so crowded with those who have "a form of godliness" but who are strangers to its transforming power. We seriously doubt whether there has ever been a time in the history of this Christian era when there were such multitudes of deceived souls within the churches, who verily believe that all is well with their souls when in fact the wrath of God abideth on them. And we know of no single thing better calculated to

undeceive them than a full and faithful exposition of these closing verses of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

The relation of this passage to the context is easily determined. Taking the more remote one, this final section forms a fitting conclusion to the whole address, which, be it remembered, was delivered in the hearing of the multitude (5:1; 7:28), though more immediately to His "disciples." It was a most suitable climax. Christ had commenced by delineating the character of those who are approved of God, and He finished by describing those upon whom eternal judgment will fall. Herein we may see how the chief of the apostles patterned his ministry after the example of his Master. If on the one hand "love" constrained him, on the other hand it was by "the terror of the Lord," that he sought to persuade men. Thus, when standing before Felix, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment" so that the governor "trembled" (Acts 24:25). Alas, how little of this faithful dealing with souls is there in this degenerate day: how little probing of the conscience, how little plain speaking of the awful doom awaiting the ungodly, how little shaking them out of their fatal complacency.

If we look at the more immediate context we shall be increasingly impressed with the appropriateness of this solemn peroration. Our Lord had just uttered warning against the false prophets, who are to be recognized by the "fruits" which they bear, or in other words by the "converts" which they make, the disciples they draw after them. It is the antinomian beguilers who are there more specially in view, as is clear from our Lord's words "which come to you in sheep's clothing," thereby concealing their real character. In like manner their adherents assume a sanctimonious pose and employ the most pious language, carrying a Bible with them wherever they go and being able to quote it freely. They refer to the Redeemer in most reverent terms, being particular to accord Him His title of "Lord." Nevertheless, when weighed in the balances they are found wanting, for they are lacking in vital godliness. Their hearts are not renewed,

their wills are not surrendered to God, their conduct corresponds not with their high pretensions.

It is the juxtaposition of Matthew 7:19, and 7:20, which enables us clearly to perceive the scope of the latter. Though the Saviour had said in verse 16 "Ye shall know them by their fruits," He repeats this identifying mark of these deceivers of souls in verse 20, and then immediately adds "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom." The intimate connection then between these two sections of His Address is too plain to miss: the converts made by the false prophets are big talkers but little doers. They claim to be devoutly attached to Christ but their claim is invalid, being unsupported by the evidence which is necessary to give it credibility. Their fine talk is not corroborated by a Christian walk, and therefore it is insufficient to obtain for them an entrance into His kingdom. If the blind follow the blind both fall into the ditch. It takes something more than "sheep's clothing" to make one a servant of Christ, and something more than lip service is needed before He will own anyone as a true disciple of His. It is empty and windy professors whom He here exposes.

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." Let us consider first the application of these words to those who were immediately addressed. Many of the Jews were so impressed by the miracles wrought by Christ that they were disposed to be His disciples while ignorant of and in fact strongly opposed to His doctrine concerning salvation and the requirements of the kingdom of God. "When He was in Jerusalem at the passover in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them" (John 2:23, 24). Nicodemus expressed the attitude of some of the more influential when he said "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). But so far from allowing Nicodemus to entertain the idea that an acknowledgment of Him as a

"teacher sent from God" would secure for him the blessings He came to bestow, He told him frankly that except he were born again he could neither see nor enter the kingdom of God.

When Christ had fed the great multitude with the five loaves and two small fishes, so deeply were they impressed that we are told: "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Yet "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force and make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone" (John 6:14, 15). This it was which directly occasioned the searching declaration of the section which is now before us. Very far was He from taking advantage of a temporary and superficial bias of men in His favour: plain speaking and honest dealings characterized the whole of His transactions with His countrymen. It was to prevent them from imagining that their owning Him as Prophet, or even acknowledging Him as the Messiah in the sense that they understood the term, was sufficient that He here impressed upon His hearers that they must be actually and personally doers of God's will before they were qualified to participate in the blessings of His spiritual and eternal kingdom.

While the verses before us were addressed first and locally to the Jews of Christ's day, yet it is obvious that they have a far wider application, that they belong to the Gentiles of our day. As we have proceeded through this Sermon section by section, we have endeavoured to point out again and again and make clear the force and relevancy of our Lord's words as they respected His immediate hearers and also their pertinency unto and bearing upon ourselves. There was nothing provincial or evanescent in the teaching of Christ: it was designed for all nations and for all generations, and by it all men will yet be judged (John 12:48). This declaration of Christ's then is full of important instruction to all in every country and every age, wherever the Gospel is presented to the examination and reception of men. It was true at the beginning, it is just as true today, and will continue so long as the world lasts, that some, yea, many, will go no

farther than a mere lip profession, and consequently will be excluded from the kingdom: and that only those who really perform the Divine will shall enter into the enjoyment of the blessings of Christianity.

This expression "the kingdom of heaven" need not detain us very long, for we have explained its meaning in previous chapters. As it is employed here it is synonymous with "the kingdom of God" in John 3:3, as a comparison of Matthew 18:3, and Luke 18:17, clearly proves. It had reference to the new order of things introduced by the Messiah, being in contrast with and the successor of Judaism. That new order of things may be contemplated as beginning in this present life and perfected in the life to come, they being two aspects of the one economy: the former we designate the kingdom of grace and the latter the kingdom of glory. Most of the older commentators understood "the kingdom of heaven" in the verse now before us as referring to the second aspect, and therefore as being equivalent to the state of celestial blessedness: but personally we see no reason for this restriction. A mere lip profession fails to secure even a present participation in the peculiar privileges of Christianity, for it obtains neither reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, nor an enjoyment of that holy happiness which is the portion now of those truly converted. It inevitably follows that those who enter not the kingdom of grace on earth will never enter the kingdom of glory in heaven.

"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," or as we find it in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord. . .?" This expression is equivalent to acknowledging Christ as Teacher and Master, even owning Him as the Son of God, the alone Saviour of sinners. There is a designed emphasis in the "Lord, Lord," for it is meant to express not merely profession, but a decided, open, habitual profession. Thus Christ here declares that a mere verbal acknowledgment of the truth concerning His person or a lip profession that we are His disciples, prepared to accept His teaching, however explicit, public, and often repeated that profession be, does not open the way to the enjoyment of the special blessings of

His kingdom, unless it is proved to be the result of true repentance and sound conversion, and unless it be accompanied with a corresponding course of conduct in doing the will of the Father. An outward profession of the most orthodox religion is useless if it be joined not with vital godliness and sincere obedience. Even the demons owned Him as the "Son of God" (Matthew 8:29), but what did it avail them?

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that no entrance into the kingdom of God is possible unless Christ is owned as "Lord." Unitarians and those "modernists" who deny that Christ is anything more than the ideal Man are certainly outside the pale of salvation. "The words before us obviously imply, what is very distinctly stated in other parts of Scripture, that a profession of discipleship and acknowledgment of our submission in mind and heart to Christ Jesus is absolutely necessary in order to our enjoying the privileges of discipleship. No person who does not call Christ 'Lord, Lord' can enter into the kingdom of God: no man who is ignorant of His claims, who treats these claims with neglect, who rejects these claims, or who though he may be all but persuaded that these claims are just, yet from worldly motives does not acknowledge them—no such person can participate in the peculiar blessings of His disciples, either on earth or in heaven" (John Brown, to whom we are indebted for some things above and in what follows). "Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am" (John 13:13). "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God" (2 John 9).

But while the necessity of owning Christ as Lord is clearly implied in His words here, the truth which they more directly teach is that profession, however necessary in connection with faith and obedience, cannot of itself secure a participation in the spiritual blessings of the new economy. No matter how loudly a man avows his acceptance of the teachings of Christ, unless he be a doer of the Word his avowals count for nothing. He who requires the heart will not be put off with shadows for the substance, the mere semblance

for the reality, words instead of works. Empty compliments are not worth the breath which utters them. They who trust in a form of godliness which is devoid of its power are building their hopes upon a foundation of sand. Not only is a bare profession insufficient for the saving of the soul, but it is an insult to Christ Himself. It is a horrible mockery to call Him Lord while we continue to do only what is pleasing to ourselves, to profess to obey Him while we treat His commands with contempt. It is obedience which marks men as His disciples and distinguishes them from the subjects of Satan.

Let us now describe the different types of professors. First, there are those who are simply nominal ones. They bear the name of "Christians" and that is all. They happen to have been born in a country where Christianity is the prevailing religion and where it is regarded as a mark of respectability to give some recognition and assent to it. A few drops of water were sprinkled upon them in infancy by a preacher and possibly they received some kind of instruction in the rudiments of religion during the days of their childhood. But after reaching maturity, excepting for an occasional visit to a church, probably at "Christmas" or "Easter," that is as far as they go. Yet if asked to declare themselves they readily affirm they are "Christians," but that means little or nothing more than that they are not Jews, pagans or open infidels. Such persons usually are grossly ignorant of the very fundamentals of the Faith and often the lives of respectable heathen would put theirs to shame. Surely such people are outside the kingdom of God. They cannot participate in its blessings either on earth or in heaven: if they could, its blessings would not be spiritual ones.

Second, formal professors. This class is made up of those who regard themselves as much in advance of the ones in the former. They are able to repeat some catechism, or at least give a fairly intelligent account of both the doctrine and the laws of Christ. If not members of a church they are at least "adherents" and regular attenders at its services. They claim to be submissive to Christ's authority and observe all the outward acts of worship which characterize His

followers, but they know nothing of the blessedness of communion with the Lord, nor is His joy their strength. Their religion is but a mental assent to an orthodox creed and going through a round of external observances. They evince no desire for the Truth to have a dominating power over their affections and wills, and most of them regard as deluded enthusiasts and canting hypocrites those who regard experimental godliness as the only genuine Christianity, and pant after a deeper acquaintance with God. It is plain that these, too, are outside the kingdom, being strangers to those operations of the Spirit which alone make us meet for it.

Third, deceived professors. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12). Those in this class look with pharisaical pity upon those described above. These deem themselves better taught. They place no reliance upon infant sprinkling, no subscription to the soundest confession of faith, rather do they pride themselves upon an intellectual assent to the letter of Holy Writ. They are quite sure that Christ died for them and that they have accepted Him as their personal Saviour. None can shake their assurance. Yet meekness and lowliness characterize them not, forbearing one another and forgiving one another they are strangers to, the fruit of the Spirit and practical godliness are missing from their daily lives. Their associates address them as "Brother" or "Sister" and that suffices. But what does it profit me to have the reputation of being a wealthy man if I have not the wherewithal to purchase the necessities of life? What avails it to call me a healthy person if disease be eating away my very vitals? If Christ bars the door of the kingdom against me no personal assurance will give me entrance.

Fourth, hypocritical professors. The number in this class, we are fain to believe, is much smaller than in the preceding ones: for them there is some hope while life lasts, but for these we can see none. Hypocritical professors are those who deliberately assume a role: they are consciously playing a part. They know that they are not Christians, but for one reason or other are anxious to make their

fellows believe they are so. Some of them belonged formerly to one of the other groups, to the third especially, then they discovered the emptiness of their profession or that they had been deceived; too dishonest to disclaim themselves as Christians they took increased pains to persuade others of their piety. Not content with a dull, formal round of duties, they put on the appearance of a deep interest in the things of God and of zeal in seeking to promote His cause. This is incomparably the vilest of the four classes we have sketched. Such conduct is no less contemptible than irrational. God cannot be imposed upon and no affronts are likely to be more severely punished than dishonor done to His omniscience. The hypocrite's portion will be the "outer darkness" where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Fifth, the genuine professor. This is the real Christian, who enjoys the blessings of the kingdom of grace here and will be admitted to the bliss of the kingdom of glory hereafter. He is described here according to his conduct or actions: "but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." Two points need determining: what is here signified by the Father's will, and what is meant by the doing of it? "The fundamental part of doing the will of God is revealed in these words: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him' (Matthew 17:5). Where this is complied with, everything else follows" (J. Brown). The will of the Father is perfectly made known by the incarnate Word, for He is the final Spokesman of God (Heb. 1:1, 2), all judgment being committed unto Him (John 5:22). The will of the Father is that we should forsake our sins, trust in His Son, take His yoke upon us, and follow Him; to do less and yet call Him our Lord is most horrible mockery. So perfect and intimate is the oneness of the Father and the Son that Christ goes on to say: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them," is like one who builds his house upon a rock (v. 24 and cf. Luke 6:46).

What is meant by doing the Divine will? Obviously it does not connote a perfect or flawless performance thereof, for there is no Christian who has ever attained to such excellence in this life, though

nothing short of this is the standard set before us (Matthew 5:48). It means that I have surrendered my heart and will to the claims of Christ, so that I truly desire Him to "reign over" me (Luke 19:14) and order my life. It means that I have subjected myself to His authority and that it is the prevailing bent of my mind and constant endeavour to please and honour Him in all things. It means that I genuinely aim to be both internally and externally conformed to His holy image, and that it is my greatest grief when I do those things which displease Him. It means I truly seek that my thoughts, affections and actions are regulated by His precepts. It is not a sinless obedience which is here in view, but it is a sincere one. It is not a forced one, but prompted by love. It is not merely an external compliance with the Divine commands but a "doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6).

The Works of the Workers of Iniquity

There are few passages in all the Word of God which are more solemn than Matthew 7:21-23, and which are more calculated to induce the sober believer to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Certainly this writer regards it as much too important to skim over hastily. In these verses the Lord makes it known that there are those who regard themselves as genuine Christians merely because they have certain resemblances to the children of God, and who are even looked upon as such by others simply because of their outward conformity to the principles and ordinances of Christianity, and yet are denounced by Christ as "ye that work iniquity." So presumptuous are they that they are firmly convinced heaven is theirs, yea, they are here represented as complaining to their Judge when He closes the door against them, putting in a plea for their claim at the bar of justice and arguing as though it were unfair that

they should be excluded from the everlasting bliss of the righteous. Thus it is clearly implied that they lived and died in the full assurance that they were the objects of God's approbation, that they were completely secured from the wrath to come.

Nor is this fatal delusion cherished by a comparative few, for our Lord here gives plain intimation that there are "many" who have implicit confidence in their salvation, but who will nevertheless hear from His lips those terrible words, "depart from Me." How is their infatuation to be explained? The general answer would be, The deceitfulness of the human heart plus the sophistries of Satan. But on so deeply serious a matter as this we need something more than generalizations. When a thoughtful person learns that some dangerous disease is menacing the community, he wants to learn all he can about its nature, its symptoms, and especially the best means of prevention, of safeguarding himself against it. If we deem no pains and care too much in fortifying ourselves against a bodily disease, will the reader complain at the slowness of the writer's progress if he endeavors to give a more specific and detailed answer to this weighty question: how shall we account for such a fatal confidence? We will seek to point out the grounds on which such a delusion rests, that we may avoid this woeful mistake.

I. Ignorance. In our last we showed at some length the insufficiency of a mere intellectual acquaintance with the letter of Scripture, but let it not be concluded therefrom that a notional knowledge of the Truth is of no value because it falls short of a saving one, still less derive encouragement for slothfulness. It is in the use of means that God is often pleased to meet with souls, and while they are reading and meditating on His Word to shine into their hearts. Scripture places no premium upon ignorance or indolence. Instead of asking, If such knowledge will not bring a man to heaven, to what purpose is it to labour after knowledge? rather say to yourself, How far must I be from heaven if I lack even that knowledge I What we brought out on the subject of a notional knowledge of the Truth in our last, instead of affording comfort to the ignorant should rather strike

them with fear and trembling. If so much knowledge will not secure salvation, then how much worse is my case when I am destitute of what even he possesses. If those who come so near to the kingdom as to be able to view it cannot enter, then what hope is there for those who are content to remain far off from it.

So near are the ignorant to hell that they are within the very shadow of it. "Darkness . . . and shadow of death" are joined together in Scripture (Matthew 4:16). Ignorance is spiritual darkness, the very shadow of eternal death. There is but a thin partition between those immersed in spiritual ignorance and hell itself. Hell is termed "the outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12) because ignorance is the inner darkness, the next room as it were to hell itself. Sad indeed is the condition of such. If those who come so near to Canaan as to obtain a taste of its wondrous fruits yet fall in the wilderness so that they never enter it, how can they expect to enter Canaan who refuse to stir out of Egyptian darkness? One with much knowledge may possibly perish, but one who is quite ignorant of spiritual things shall certainly perish. When God makes mention of "a people of no understanding," He at once adds, "therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them" (Isa. 27:11). "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise" certainly does not hold good here.

We do not have to go as far afield today as what is termed heathendom: there are millions within Christendom, yea, countless thousands of churchgoers and members, who know not what is necessary to bring a soul to heaven. They know not that regeneration is imperative, that "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," that as a fish cannot live out of water because away from its own element, so man is totally unfit for communion with the Holy One until he be renewed within. They know not that there must be a new creation, a miracle of grace wrought in the soul to make fallen man a new creature, so that it can be said of him, "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). The new Jerusalem is for new creatures. They know not that God must communicate to the heart a principle of holiness before there

can be any holy affections, motions or fruits. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), and by nature man does not have the least grain of it.

So ignorant are the vast majority of those even in places reputed to be sound and orthodox that they know not that there must be the denying of self before anyone can become a follower of Christ: a repudiation of our own wisdom, righteousness, strength, desires, will, and interests. They know not that there must be a renunciation of the world before anyone can be a follower of Him who left the glories of heaven and entered the manger of Bethlehem: that we must be crucified unto the world and the world unto us or we shall never enter into the benefits and blessings purchased by the crucifixion of Christ. They know not that there must be a plucking out of right eyes and a cutting off of right hands, a mortifying of the flesh with its affections and lusts, so that we die daily. They know not that there must be a taking up of the cross if any man will come after Christ, which will cost him the loss of godless companions, the scorn of professors, many a tear and groan. They know not that the Christian life is a fierce wrestling (Eph. 6:12), a continual fight, a race that has to be run with all our might if the crown is to be obtained. If they really knew these things they would not be nearly so confident of heaven when they are total strangers to the very things required of all those for whom heaven is intended.

2. Negligence and slothfulness. Those who do have a vague and general idea of the things mentioned above are too indolent to lay them to heart, make them their chief concern and prayerful meditation, that they may understand them more clearly. Even if they know them they will not take the pains seriously to examine their state by them: they will not go to the trouble of comparing their hearts with the Divine rule. So little interested are they in their eternal welfare that they will not spare a few hours to inquire solemnly whether or not they measure up to what the Word of God requires of them. Alas, for the wretched carelessness of the vast majority concerning their souls and everlasting state. They conduct

themselves as atheists, acting as though there be no God, no day of reckoning, no lake of fire. They carry themselves as madmen, chasing shadows, playing with dynamite, sporting on the edge of the pit. They are indeed beside themselves (Luke 15:17), devoid of "the spirit . . . of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). If they were sane they would study God's Word to discover its directions concerning salvation, and would test themselves by those directions.

Their very indifference and carelessness demonstrate the mass of our fellows to be practical atheists and spiritual lunatics. If they were sane they would be deeply concerned whether heaven or hell was to be their eternal abode. They would deem no trouble too great to ascertain which they were journeying unto, which their personal condition fitted them for. They would snatch a few of their swiftly passing hours and devote them to diligent inquiry and self-examination. They would not proffer idle excuses and postpone the task, but would promptly and earnestly set about it. Only those bereft of spiritual sense and reason would neglect a matter the issue of which is either everlasting life or everlasting death. But no; rather than seriously trouble themselves, they will complacently assume all is well with them and take it on trust that they are bound for heaven, when the only grounds they have for such trust are the lies of Satan and that which their own deceitful hearts prompt; and thus they rest the whole weight of eternity upon a cobweb and pin the everlasting concern of their souls upon a shadow.

What makes it more inexcusable is the fact that these same people are quite competent and painstaking over their temporal affairs. If a new position be offered them they make careful inquiries before committing themselves. If they purpose making an investment they go to much trouble in ascertaining the soundness of it. If they think of purchasing a property they make full investigations as to its title-deeds and value. But when it comes to eternal things they are dilatory and slipshod, half-hearted and lazy. They make no serious preparation to meet their God, and when His call comes it finds them wanting. They are sluggards and therefore the sluggard's portion and

doom will be theirs. Thus, when men and women are so slack and careless about their souls, when they will not make serious and solemn inquiry about their state, we need not wonder that so many are so woefully mistaken as to promise themselves heaven when in reality nothing but hell is reserved for them.

3. Misapprehensions of God. Where people are in ignorance and where they are too sottish to make any real and serious effort to dispel their ignorance, false conceptions of the Divine character are certain to obtain. True there are degrees of ignorance and therefore there are considerable differences in the erroneous ideas men form of God. But those formed by the unregenerate, whether they be the gross ones of the heathen or the more refined ones of Christendom, are alike false. Viewing God through the blurred lens of depraved hearts and minds they fashion Him as one suited to their corrupt inclinations. They invent a God who treats sin lightly, who looks with indulgence upon their waywardness, who is willing to accept a few religious performances as sufficient compensation for all their debt. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" is the charge which He prefers against them, but adds: "I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. 1:21).

They do not believe that God is inexorably just so that He will "by no means clear the guilty," but that every transgression and disobedience must receive a due recompense of reward, unless a sinless Substitute make atonement for them. They do not believe it is impossible to mock God with impunity, that as men sow they reap, so that if they sow to the flesh they must of necessity reap corruption. They do not believe that God is omniscient, that "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," for if they did it would act as a curb upon them. They do not believe God is so strict that He will call us to account for "every idle word" and that He "weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2)—the springs of action, the motives which prompt. They do not believe He is ineffably holy, so that sins of thought as well as deed, of omission as well as commission, are hateful to Him. They do not believe that God is "a consuming fire"

(Heb. 12:29) so that this world and all its works will be burned up and that everyone whose name is not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. They do not believe that God is absolute sovereign, so that "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

Even where there is sufficient light and conviction as to reveal to sinners that they come short of the Divine rule, and where they perceive that what the Word insists is necessary to salvation is not found in them, instead of abandoning their false hopes they persuade themselves that God is more merciful than the Scriptures represent Him to be. It is true, says the sinner, in such a case, that the way to heaven is a narrow one and that God's kingdom can only be entered "through much tribulation" (Acts 14:22), but God will save me even though I fail here and there and I be lacking in this and that. It is true that God is merciful, yet for one sin He banished our first parents from Eden! It is true that God is merciful, but for one sin His curse descended upon Ham and his posterity. It is true that God is merciful, but for one sin Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, Achan and his family were stoned to death, Gehazi was smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira became corpses. God is merciful, yet He sent the flood upon the world of the ungodly, rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of the plain, sent His angel and slew all the firstborn of Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea.

Though they allow themselves in this sin and that, though they are thoroughly self-willed and self-pleasing, they tell themselves that God is lenient. Though they ignore God's righteous claims upon them and make no effort to meet His holy requirements, they comfort themselves with the thought that He is gracious. They refuse to allow that He is as strict and rigid as His faithful servants declare Him to be. They petulantly ask, Even though I be not so precise and puritanical as some are, shall I not be saved even as they? Though I come not up to their standard, yet God is very pitiful and knows how weak we are, and therefore He will lower the standard for me so that

I may be saved as well as the best of them. Poor deluded souls, if that be all their hope, their case is indeed hopeless. Will God be so merciful as to contradict Himself and go contrary to His Word? Must He show them so much mercy as to despise His own Truth and make Himself a liar? What cause have they to tremble who have nothing to bear up their hopes of heaven but downright blasphemy!

4. Self-love and self-esteem. This is as prolific and powerful a cause of self-deception as any of those mentioned above. Sinners compare themselves with their fellows and award themselves the first prize every rime. He who is immoral regards himself as better than those who grind the poor and rob the widow. He who is a liar and a thief prides himself that he is no murderer. He who is outwardly religious deems himself vastly superior to the openly profane. Each one discovers some cause or other to say with the self-righteous Pharisee, "I thank God that I am not as this publican." This is because they measure themselves by a wrong standard. Even a soiled handkerchief looks comparatively clean if it be placed on a miry road, but were it laid on newly fallen snow its uncleanness would soon be evident. So it is with those who are blind to their deplorable condition. But men are possessed with such a high estimate of themselves, and entertain such a good opinion of their souls' condition, that even if they can be induced to measure themselves by the rule of God's Word and examine their state they come to the work prepossessed, prejudiced in their own favour. Self-love will not suffer them to deal impartially with their souls.

When they read some condemnatory passage of Scripture they refuse to appropriate it: when they hear a particularly solemn and searching sermon they take it not home to themselves but apply it to some of their fellows. If they be awakened in some measure to the awfulness of sinning against God and alarmed at the fearful punishment reserved for such, this mood is only fitful and fleeting, for they quickly reassure themselves that no such guilt rests upon them. Sudden death may strike down some of their companions, but self-delusion blinds them to their own peril. A manifest judgment from

God may fall upon their community, but they persuade themselves that they are in no danger of the wrath to come. The fact is that there are very few indeed who abandon all hope, give way to utter despair and conclude they will experience the everlasting burnings, and yet there is only a very little company who will escape them. The multitudes continue defying God, sinning with a high hand, and go on walking along the road which leads to the pit, and yet by one means or another each persuades himself he shall not enter there. "For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" (Ps. 36:2).

Yes, the sinner "flattereth himself in his own eyes." If he did not, he would be in terrible distress and anguish. He would not go on so cheerfully and gaily if he really believed himself in danger of hell. But he has too good an estimate of himself for that: he does not think he has ever done anything worthy of such a doom, he is sure he is not bad enough for such a place. Men flatter themselves that they do not live in vice, but are decent citizens and good neighbours. They can see no reason why God should be angry with them. They do not take His name in vain nor scoff at religion. Yea, they flatter themselves that they have done much to commend themselves to Him and obtain His approbation. They read their Bibles occasionally and say their prayers. They attend church and contribute to its upkeep. They send their children to the Sabbath school. They resolve that later on they will be even better, out and out for Christ. but meanwhile they want to enjoy the world a little longer, "trust in themselves that they are righteous" (Luke 18:9) and are comparatively clean in their own sight, and yet they are not washed from their filthiness (Prov. 30:12).

There be others, many such, who flatter themselves that they are genuine Christians. They persuade themselves that they have repented of their past, believed the Gospel, and that their sins are forgiven. Consequently when they hear or read anything solemn it makes no impression upon them. Self-love and self-esteem blind them to their true condition. They are Laodiceans who say, "I am rich [spiritually] and increased with goods [have made considerable

progress and grown in grace] and in need of nothing," but as the Lord declares, "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). And nothing shakes them out of their self-complacency. They continue flattering themselves "until their iniquity be found to be hateful"—until they are disillusioned in hell. As a blind man cannot judge of colors, so prejudiced in their own favour are the self-righteous that it is impossible for them to judge of the complexion of their souls, whether the image of God or the image of the Devil be stamped upon it. As one has well said, "Satan blinds one eye and self-love closes the other," and the deceitfulness of sin seals both, and thus they assure themselves that they are on the way to heaven when they are on the high road to hell. Doubtless a number of such will read this very article and be quite unsearched by it, sure that it pertains not to their case.

A closing word to Christian readers. Since the four things described above are the principal ones among the more immediate causes of deceit concerning the state of the soul, then how sincerely ought the regenerate to examine themselves at these points and seek to make sure they are not imposing on themselves. How they should "cease from man" and search the Scriptures without bias to ascertain the general tenor of their teaching as to what God requires if they are to dwell with Him for ever, not confining themselves to such verses as John 3:16, and Romans 10:13, but comparing such as Isaiah 55:7; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 5:9, so as to obtain a full answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" How cautiously and conscientiously should we examine ourselves, testing the grounds of our hope, determining whether or not there really is in us that which meets God's terms, whether or not our righteousness exceeds that of the religious formalist (Matthew 5:20). Nor can such a task be discharged hurriedly: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10)—with what earnestness should we give ourselves to this work!

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:23, 24). Yes, "knoweth Me," the living God, and not a fantasy devised by your own sentiment. To believe in a God who has no existence save in their own imagination is the case with multitudes in the churches today. "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace" (Job 22:21). To cherish the image of a fictitious god entails a fictitious peace. Eternal life is to "know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3): how we should labour after such a knowledge of Him! Finally if self-love and esteem effectually hinder an impartial examination of myself, if it be the case with a host of my fellows that "a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isa. 44:20), how earnestly should I cry to God to grant me an honest heart which desires to know the truth and nothing but the truth about my case.

Conclusion

What is the relation between our present verses and the one immediately preceding? Matthew Henry gives the following as his analysis of verses 21-23: "(1) Christ here shows by a plain remonstrance that an outward profession of religion, however remarkable, will not bring us to heaven, unless there be a correspondent conversation. (2) The hypocrite's plea against the strictness of this law, offering other things in lieu of obedience. (3) The rejection of this plea as frivolous." Personally we think William Perkins perceived more clearly the connection between verses 22, 23

and verse 21: "In these two verses Christ returns to explain and confirm the first conclusion of the former verse concerning those professors that shall not be saved. The words contain two parts: first, a description of the persons by their behavior; secondly, a declaration of their condemnation." For our own part we regard the verses which are now to be before us as containing an exemplification and amplification of what had been affirmed in the preceding one, showing that the most gifted and eminent professors will not be treated as exceptions if they fail to meet the fundamental requirement of God's kingdom.

In the previous verse Christ had declared, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven": something far more important and radical than a mere lip profession is needed in order to participate in spiritual blessings, even a full surrendering of ourselves unto Christ and a performing of the Divine will from the heart. But now the Lord went on to affirm something still more solemn and searching: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity." Here it is not simply the rank and file of those claiming to be the followers of Christ who are in view, but the most influential ones among them, their leaders and preachers. Nor does He single out a few exceptional cases, but declares that there are "many" who have occupied positions of prominence and authority, who wrought mighty works in His name, but so far from enjoying His approbation are denounced by Him as workers of iniquity.

First, it should be pointed out that the gifts and works of these men are described according to the nature of those which obtained in Bible times. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as "prophesying" today, nor has there been for eighteen centuries past. A prophet was the mouthpiece of God. Under an afflatus of the Holy Spirit he gave forth a Divine revelation. In other words, he spoke by Divine

inspiration. It was not an ordinary and natural gift, but an extraordinary and spiritual one. It was withdrawn when the Canon of Scripture was completed, for in His written Word we now have the Divine will fully revealed, containing as it does a complete and perfect rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Consequently, any person who now poses as a Divine prophet, claiming to have a special message from God, is either an impostor or a fanatic: an emissary of Satan seeking to beguile the unwary, or a neurotic who suffers his enthusiasm to run away with him, or an egoist who desires to direct attention to himself and occupy the limelight.

Because a man spoke by Divine inspiration in Bible times it was no proof that he was regenerate. Here, as everywhere else, God exercised His sovereignty, employing as His mouthpiece whom He pleased. Thus we find Balaam, the soothsayer, uttered some remarkable predictions concerning Israel, the Messiah Himself, and the judgments which should overtake various nations; all of which were fulfilled. We are told that "the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth" (Num. 23:5), that he "knew the knowledge of the most High" and "saw the vision of the Almighty" (Num. 24:6), yet he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15) and perished amid the enemies of the Lord (Num. 31:8). So also of the apostate king of Israel it is written, "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied," so that it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:10, 11). More remarkable still is the case of Caiaphas, the man who delivered up the Redeemer into the hands of Pilate, for of him we are told: "And this spake he not of himself [but by Divine inspiration]: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:51, 52).

"And in Thy name have cast out devils" or "demons." This was another of the supernatural gifts or powers bestowed upon men at the beginning of the Christian era, and yet it was not confined to the regenerate. It is at least open to doubt whether the man mentioned

in Luke 9:49, was such, for there we are told that "John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out demons in Thy name and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." But a clearer case to the point is that of the betrayer of our Lord. In Matthew 10:1, we are expressly told that "when Christ had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out," and one of that company was Judas Iscariot! Had Judas failed to perform this feat his fellow apostles had at once had their suspicions aroused, and when the Saviour announced, "One of you shall betray Me," instead of asking, "Lord, is it I?" had at once known He referred to Judas. "And in Thy name done many wonderful works" or "works of power," miraculous works—the Greek word occurring again in Matthew 11:20, in connection with Christ's "mighty works." This power too was conferred upon Judas.

If it should be asked, Why should God so remarkably endow the unregenerate, even using them as His mouthpieces? several answers might be returned. First, as has been intimated above, in order to exemplify God's uncontrollable sovereignty over and ownership of all men. He can employ His creatures as He pleases and select as His agents and instruments whom He will and none can say Him nay. Second, to display His invincible power. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord . . . He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1), and if the king's heart, so every man's; but how little is that realized today. Balaam was but a puppet in His hands, unable to resist His will. Caiaphas was the enemy of Christ and yet compelled to utter a remarkable prophecy about Him! Third, to evince that supernatural gifts and endowments—though highly esteemed among men—are not the most precious of His bestowments: something infinitely more valuable is reserved for the objects of His everlasting love. What comparison is there between Balaam's prophecy and the "new song" in the mouths of the redeemed, between the miracles performed by Judas and being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?

Our Lord thus plainly intimates that men may conduct themselves as His commissioned servants—acting in His name—that they may be endowed with the most remarkable gifts, that they may perform supernatural works, and yet not be saved. It was so at the beginning of this dispensation; it is so now. It would be a great mistake to draw the conclusion that because our Lord describes these unregenerate professors according to the terminology of the first century, when ministers were endowed with extraordinary gifts and exercised supernatural powers, that it has no direct bearing on leaders among professing Christians in this twentieth century. Because verse 22 depicts conditions which no longer obtain in kind that is no proof that it has no immediate application unto men of prominence in the religious realm today. Rather should we reason that, if such a fearful warning was needed at the beginning of this era, when men were so wonderfully gifted, how much more pertinent is it to those of lesser talents and abilities in this degenerate generation!

The modern equivalent of prophesying in the name of Christ would be preaching in His name: the casting out of demons would find its present counterpart in the deliverance of Satan's slaves chronicled by our "city missions"—such as the reforming of drunkards, reclaiming of fallen women, recovering of drug addicts; while the "wonderful works" may be taken as referring to the costly buildings termed "churches" with their huge memberships, and the sensational achievements of "missionaries" in heathen lands. Not that we wish to imply that all engaged in such activities are unregenerate; nevertheless, after close observation and personal contact with many of these workers, we seriously doubt whether more than a small percentage of them have really been born again. Nor should this at all astonish us. Our Lord Himself distinctly declared of "many" of those serving in His name, "I never knew you," and if that were true of those who wrought during the palmiest days of the Christian era, why should it be thought strange that such a state of affairs pertains now that Christendom is so apostate?

Here then is what is most solemn of all in this awe-inspiring passage: that there will be many preachers, Christian leaders and workers—and in view of our Lord's use of the word in verse 13, probably the great majority of them—who will be shut out of heaven. Sad and awful as this is, yet from our observation in many sections of Christendom and from what generally obtains we cannot say it surprises us. Among the young men accepted as students for the ministry is there any larger percentage of regenerate ones than of the young men making a Christian profession who enter not the ministry? We are far from believing they are all hypocrites. Doubtless there are many thousands who select the ministry as their avocation because of the social prestige and financial remuneration it affords. But large numbers of youths who receive the Word "with joy" (Matthew 13:20) mistake their religious enthusiasm and fervour for a call from God and love for souls, and having more zeal than knowledge, and friends who encourage rather than counsel caution, they make the great mistake.

Once the young man is accepted as a student for the ministry his regeneration is (with very rare exceptions) tacitly assumed. And what is there then which is in any wise calculated to open his deceived eyes? Some of the denominations require him to spend years at a university in order to obtain a degree, and there his time and energies are strenuously occupied with subjects that contain nothing whatever for the soul, but only that which is apt to foster intellectual conceit. One who has mistaken carnal ambition and enthusiasm for a call from God is not likely to find a course in sociology, psychology, logic, philosophy, etc., likely to disillusion him. And even when the young man is not required to enter a university, he has to take a course in "divinity." In other words he is introduced to the sacred study of theology as a subject on which to exercise his intellectual powers, as a text book over which he must pore and whose contents he must master in order to pass examinations thereon. The result is that in the vast majority of cases he is so sickened therewith that after his ordination he never again opens a theological treatise.

Nor is there any more hope, humanly speaking, that his eyes may be opened to his lost condition after he has been ordained and called to a charge. If he is to "make good" therein such a multitude of duties demand his attention that there is little opportunity for the careful examination of his own soul. There are so many departments of the church he has to superintend, so many sermons and addresses he must prepare each week, so many calls to make, that he has little leisure for self-introspection. He is so occupied with the concerns and needs of others that attention to the ministerial injunction "take heed unto thyself" (1 Tim. 4:16) is crowded out. It is greatly to be feared that thousands of ministers today have ground to lament "they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song of Sol. 1:6). But whatever be the contributing causes and occasions of this tragic fatality, the fact remains that the Divine Judge is yet going to say unto many of those who preached and wrought in His name, "I never knew you."

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity" (v. 23). There are five things here which claim our attention, though utterly insufficient is any mortal to do them justice. First, the time-mark: "then." Second, the character in which Christ is here viewed: as the Judge of men. Third, the solemn verdict announced: "I never knew you." Fourth, the fearful sentence imposed: "depart from Me." Fifth, the real character of religious formalists: "ye that work iniquity." It would not be possible to assemble together five things of greater gravity and moment than these. And what human pen is competent to comment upon subjects so awesome? Oh, that both writer and reader may approach the same with becoming reverence and solemnity.

"And then" looks back to the 'in that day' of the previous verse. It is the day of final retribution, when "every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). It is "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5), "because He hath appointed a day, in the which

He will judge the world. . . by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). Who can conceive of the consternation which will possess the hearts of impenitent rebels, of unmasked hypocrites, of disillusioned formalists, as they are compelled to stand with an assembled universe before the dread tribunal? Then will the books be opened, the secrets of all hearts disclosed, the hidden things of darkness brought to light. Then shall each one who has trampled upon the Divine Law, rejected the only Mediator, and done despite to the Spirit of grace, stand forth in his true colors, stripped of the disguise with which he imposed upon his fellow creatures. "The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him" (Job 20:27). They will be speechless with guilt, utterly overwhelmed, unable to "stand in the judgment" (Ps. 1:5).

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The Speaker is the Lord Jesus, ye not as presenting Himself as the Saviour of sinners, but rather officiating as their Judge, pronouncing their doom. In this solemn passage our Lord gave plain intimation that He was more than man, that He is none other than the Arbiter of every man's eternal state, from whose decision there can be no appeal. Amazing indeed was the contrast between His lowly appearance and external circumstances and this language of conscious majesty and power. While delivering this sermon on the mount Christ appeared before men's eyes as a Galilean peasant, yet both the tone and tenor of it proclaimed Him to be none other than Immanuel, God manifest in flesh. No wonder we are told that "when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: For He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (vv. 28, 29) And it is before this very Judge that both writer and reader must yet appear!

"I never knew you." This does not mean that Christ was totally unacquainted with their persons, that He was not cognizant of their character and conduct. No, rather does it signify that He did not approve of or accept them. When it is said, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous" (Ps. 1:6), it is to be understood that He is

pleased with the same. Here then is the awful verdict: "I never knew you"; no, not even when you were preaching and working in My name. You may have deceived yourselves and those to whom you ministered, but it was impossible to impose upon Me. In His "I will profess unto them," He seems to speak ironically: you have professed much, made free use of My name, maintained your standing as leaders in the Church—so now hear My profession! "I never knew you" makes it quite clear they were not such as had fallen from grace, as it also looks back to eternity past: they had never been born again, never evangelically repented, never believed savingly, and had not been among the favored company upon whom His approbation rested before the foundation of the world.

"Depart from Me." Here is the fearful sentence imposed. They may have been highly respected in the churches, but they are objects of abhorrence to the Lord Christ. They frequently had His name on their lips, but since He dwelt not in their hearts they are totally disqualified for the celestial courts. "If the most admired and useful preacher on earth had no better evidence of his conversion than his abilities and success as a preacher, he would preach to others and be himself a castaway" (T. Scott). "Depart from Me" is the announcement of their just condemnation. They had been near to Him by their profession and by the position they held in the Church, but now they must go to the only place for which they are fitted, which is banishment from the Holy One. Herein we discover the force of that terrible expression "the second death" (Rev. 21:8): it is not extinction of being or the annihilation of the soul, but eternal separation from Christ, alienation from the life of God; it is a being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9), cut off for ever from the Bestower of blessing, tormented in the lake of fire.

"Ye that work iniquity." How different is the Divine estimate from the human! These preachers and leaders pleaded that they had wrought many "wonderful works," but because they had not proceeded from renewed hearts, because they had been done to win

the applause of their fellows, rather than for the glory of God, the One who cannot be imposed upon declares they are "works of iniquity." Ah, my reader, we may look upon and admire the outward show, but the One who will yet judge us "looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), and therefore "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15)—even the righteousnesses of the natural man are but "filthy rags" in His sight.

Not only the gross external crimes, but pride and presumption and the religious performances of hypocrites are "works of iniquity."

In view of the chapters preceding this one there is no need for us to make a lengthy application here. The chief lesson for us to take to heart from the above is the utter insufficiency of the most imposing gifts. Yet how many there are who suppose that the exercise of unusual abilities in the church is evidence of great spirituality. As uncommon natural endowments are by no means always accompanied by moral worth, so the presence of abnormal powers is no proof of regeneration. We must learn to distinguish between the performing of wonderful works and the possession of spiritual graces, for the former is no guarantee of the latter. Showy talents may raise a man above his fellows, even above genuine Christians, but unless he is indwelt by the Spirit of God what are they worth? "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries. . .and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13: 2). Then let us search ourselves and see whether or not we have something better than those to whom Christ will yet say, "I never knew you." A principle of holiness within evidenced by a godly walk without is infinitely to be preferred above the power to cast out demons and heal the sick. To commune with God in private is an inestimably grander privilege than to speak with tongues in public.

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