



*The
Law
of
Life*

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THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying,

² I am Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.

This is the first and greatest commandment, and the one which comprehends all the others. It is the summing up of all whole law, for we read that the first and great commandment is:

Matthew 22

³⁷ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all by soul, and with all your mind.

³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.

The second one is:

³⁹ And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

It is “like unto it”. It is not separate from the first, but is included in it, since “love is of God,” and only as the love of God is shed abroad in one’s heart can one love his neighbor as himself.

So to love the Lord with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the strength, and with all the mind,—that is, to have no other gods before Him,—is the sum of human duty.

1 Corinthians 8

⁴ ...there is none other God but one.

⁵ For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

⁶ But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Therefore it is that we are to love the Lord,

Deuteronomy 6

⁵ ...with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

The Law not Out of Date

In these days the commandments are thought by many to be out of date. They are regarded generally as a relic of the past age and an inferior civilization. People think that Christianity has outgrown them, and has brought in larger and more perfect views of truth and duty.

It is even sometimes said by ministers of the Gospel that those Christians who have not gone beyond what is required in the ten commandments have a very narrow experience. Those who hold such views need to pray the prayer of the Psalmist:

Psalm 119

¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law.

It is their minds that are narrow, and not the commandment, for...

⁹⁶ ...Your commandment is exceeding broad.

Therefore it is, as God said of Ephraim,

Hosea 8

¹² I have written to him to great things of My law, but they were counted as a strange thing.

Psalm 19

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

Therefore the one who regards the law as a strange thing, must be a stranger to conversion, righteousness, purity, and

perfection.

No soul, either in this world or in the world to come, whether man or angel, can get beyond this one precept,

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.

Or its other form:

Luke 10

²⁷ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.

It is obvious that to get beyond this commandment would be to break it, since it would be having other gods before the true God.

As there are so many who think that the commandments are out of date, it is not surprising that they regard this one at least as not necessary. Of course they will admit that is necessary to preach it in India and China and other lands where false gods are worshiped; but while not consciously disparaging it, they think that we stand in no need of it, since we do not worship other gods. This is a great mistake; there is not a Christian in any country who cannot say with Isaiah:

Isaiah 26

¹⁸ O Lord our God, other lords beside You have had dominion over us.

Worship is Service

When Jesus repelled the temptation of Satan, He said to him,

Matthew 4

¹⁰ Get you hence, Satan, for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.

So the Apostle Paul said to the ship's company with whom he sailed,

Acts 27

²³ There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.

The distinguishing characteristic of the one who recognizes the Lord as his God, is service. Therefore the commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me”, simply means, “You shall serve Me only.” And so, as we have seen, it means that we shall love Him only, love Him with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Just to the extent that this is not done, has one put other gods before Him. When we see the commandment in this light, we shall be forced to conclude that the proportion of people who violate it cannot be much greater in Africa or India than in Europe.

Who Can Keep the Commandments?

Just before Joshua died, he gathered all the people and the elders of Israel together, and recounted to them what God had done for them, saying,

Joshua 24

¹⁴ Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood [the river], and in Egypt; and serve you the Lord.

¹⁵ And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And they said,

¹⁶ God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods;

¹⁷ For the Lord our God, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage...

¹⁸ ...therefore will we also serve the Lord; for He is our God.

That certainly was a good declaration, but Joshua immediately replied to them,

Joshua 24

¹⁹ You cannot serve the Lord; for He is a holy God.

How this must have dashed the spirits of those Israelites; and yet it is true of us as of them, and it contains a wonderful promise, if we will but take it. It does not mean that God cannot be served, for Joshua had just said,

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Paul also declared that he served the Lord. But it does mean that only holy people can serve a holy God; and since God says to us, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve”, we may take it as it the assurance that He will sanctify us if we will yield to Him, so that it will be possible for us to serve Him perfectly.

Malachi 3

³ [The Lord] shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer up to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

This shows how we may keep the commandments. We do not keep them in order to be righteous, but God makes us righteous,—frees us from the bondage of sin,—in order that we may keep them. Only when God has cleansed the heart, and driven out every idol, can this first and great commandment be kept.

Love means Giving

All this shows the supreme importance of this commandment to everybody, everywhere, and at all times.

Romans 13

¹⁰ ...love is the fulfilling of the law.

And love means giving:

John 3

¹⁶ God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son...

Galatians 2

²⁰ ...He loved me, and gave Himself for me.

1 John 4

¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

God showed His love for us in giving Himself for us. Therefore we can show our love to Him only by giving ourselves to Him, and acknowledging His right to have sole control of us.

When Paul said that he served God, he said also, "whose I am." *Acts 27:23*. Therefore the commandment,

"You shall have no other gods before Me,"

or its fuller expression,

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind,"

means that we must give to the Lord our whole heart, our whole life, and every faculty of mind and body. "With all your strength," means not only all the strength that we now have, but all that we ought to have, all that is possible for God to exert through our bodies.

It makes a vast difference who handles an instrument. A very good instrument may do very poor work in untrained hands; but when the master takes hold of it, the result is different.

So while we are weak, and we have made ourselves unnaturally weak through our failure to serve God, we are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God, that He may not merely receive from us the poor strength of which we are conscious, but that He may do through us ex-

ceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us.

Those who believe, will know the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ; and although we are now without strength, yet when in love and loyalty we yield ourselves to Him for service, His own mighty power in us will be counted to us as service which we have rendered.

Holiness—Whole Service

Hereby may we readily know whether or not we have other gods before Him:

- If we are not ready to do every good work;
- If there is any organ of our body or any portion of our mind not controlled by Him;
- If in any degree our will has not been completely yielded to Him;
- If we are servants of our own flesh;
- If any sinful propensity has dominion over us to any degree;

Just to that extent are we violating the first commandment.

And so we see that the keeping of this commandment means health, for there are many people who with sorrow say that they cannot serve the Lord as he would like to, because of their feeble condition. They are loaded down with divers diseases, but God says, “I am the Lord that heals you,” or “the Lord your Physician.” *Exodus* 15:26.

He requires us to serve Him with our whole life, with our whole strength, and this means that He expects us to be whole, in order that we may serve Him perfectly. A whole person is a holy person, and since, as we have learned, only a holy person can serve a holy God, we have the assurance that if we will yield our bodies to His life, He will heal us so that

we may give to Him whole service. If we do not do this, if we continue to violate the laws of life, thus weakening our bodies or any member of our bodies, we are worshiping other gods beside Him.

Day by day we pray or ought to,

Matthew 6

¹⁰ Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Christ said,

Luke 17

²¹ ...the kingdom of God is within you.

God is King over all the earth, for “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof,” (*Psalms* 24:1) although His right to rule is not acknowledged in the earth. Even so we are His rightful kingdom, although He has not been allowed to rule in our hearts.

So when we pray the Lord’s prayer understandingly, we are saying to the Lord,

“I belong to You; rule in the midst of Your enemies, pulling down strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

We are a people of God’s own possession. But evil cannot dwell with Him; therefore if there is filthiness of the flesh or spirit, He is crowded out from His rightful dominion, and other gods are put in His place.

2 Corinthians 6

¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

How many can say the following to the Lord?

Psalm 73

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but You? and their is none upon earth that I desire beside You.

To many this seems a fearful cutting off of all the pleasures of life, but that is only because they do not know Him, and that in His presence is fulness of joy. In Him all things consist, and without Him we have really nothing,

Psalm 96

⁵ For all the gods of the heathen are idols...

Romans 8

³² He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him out for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Preparation for Christ's Coming

The keeping of this first commandment is the necessary preparation for the coming of the Lord.

1 John 3

² ...we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

³ And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure.

We shall then see Him as He is, because we shall have already been changed into His image by beholding Him. Therefore to this end the message is proclaimed,

Isaiah 40

⁹ ...Behold your God!

No other god is to intervene to shut off the view. Because the hour of His Judgment is come, we are to:

Revelation 14

⁷ ...fear God, and give glory to Him...and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

This, we see, is nothing more than the repetition of the first

commandment. We are to know Him only, and Christ came to declare Him. The commandment is life everlasting (*John* 12:50), and it is eternal life to know God. *John* 17:3. Those who know Him will put their trust in Him, and when He appears will say,

Isaiah 25

⁹ ...Lo, this is our God.

The Essence of Heathenism

Christ said,

Matthew 6

³¹ Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed?

³² For all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.

³³ But seek you first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

The word “Gentile” means heathen, and the characteristic of the heathen is to be anxious, and to worry about temporal affairs. And herein many professed Christians show that they have not been wholly emancipated from heathenism.

“Times are hard; coats are dear; work is scarce; clothes are wearing out, and we cannot see where the money is coming from to replace them.”

They forget that their heavenly Father knows that they have need of all these things. By such expressions of anxiety and doubt, they virtually say that the God whom they serve is no different from the gods of wood and stone that the heathen worship.

“After all these things do the heathen seek,” because they know that their gods cannot provide for them. They know that they must provide for themselves, so far as their gods are concerned.

But,

Psalm 115

³ Our God is in the heavens; He has done whatsoever He has pleased.

He is the Universal Provider:

Acts 17

²⁵ ...He gives to all life, and breath, and all things.

To doubt that all things that we need will be supplied, because we cannot see how they are to come, is to be like the heathen, who do not believe in a god that they cannot see.

The Sign of the True God

After Jesus had healed the man born blind, He found him and said to him,

John 9

³⁵ ...Do you believe on the Son of God?

³⁶ He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

In like manner, when the commandment “You shall have no other gods before Me,” is preached, men might say,

“Who is this God, that we may worship Him?”

God has provided beforehand the answer to this question. He says,

Ezekiel 20

¹² I gave them My Sabbaths...that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them;

and

²⁰ Hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.

The true God is the God who sanctifies, and delivers from the bondage of sin. He delivers and sanctifies by His creative power, which is made known through the Sabbath. For when He had made all things new, He rested, and when we are

wholly passive in His hands, we rest in Him, having been made new.

The one great question of the ages is, "Who is God?" It was first introduced when Satan said, "I will be like the Most High," attempting to put himself in the place of God. The same spirit he instilled into his angels, so that there are multitudes of false gods. Everyone who follows Satan is filled with the same spirit, the spirit of self-seeking, self-exaltation.

But it is not in this way that men know God, or become like Him. Christ, who is the manifestation of God, says,

Matthew 11

²⁹ ...learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls.

God reveals His divinity in the gift of His only begotten Son, who gives His life for the redemption of the world. By self-surrender, the complete denial of self, we become acquainted with God. Only by self-abasement are we lifted up into the high and holy place, to dwell with Him who inhabits eternity.

Satan has done everything that he could do to hide God and His power from men. The Sabbath, which is God's memorial, he has made the busiest day of the week, the day on which, humanly speaking, it seems most inconvenient to rest from labor.

And right here is the strongest test as to whether men recognize and worship the true God. Is He able to give life? Can God clothe those who trust in Him? Can He give bread in the wilderness?

How many fully convinced of their duty to keep the Sabbath, have come to this point and have wavered and turned back; and yet they profess to believe in God as the Saviour of their souls, the One who will keep them alive throughout eternity.

But do they believe? Does one really trust God for his soul's eternal salvation, if he cannot trust Him for the support of his body for this short life, which is but for a moment?

The Psalmist said:

Psalm 119

⁶⁰ I made haste, and delayed not to keep Your commandments.

In this is shown true worship of God. There are many who come face to face with the Sabbath law, who say that they will keep it as soon as they can get their business into proper shape or can dispose of it. Some have debts, and think that they must continue their present employment which they regard as sure, until they get their debts paid. Then they will be prepared to keep the Sabbath.

But that does not indicate such trust in God as must characterize one who worships Him only. There is really no difference between the one who waits till he can pay the debt of a hundred pounds, and the one who says,

“I am a poor man, with nothing to live on; as soon as I have one hundred pounds in hand, then I can serve the Lord without fear of coming to want.”

So when he does begin his supposed service, he is not really trusting God, but what he himself has done. All distrust of God, even to the slightest degree, is a violation of the commandment, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Deliverance from Egypt

What a grand thing it is to know that God is a holy God and that He has power to save. This is the sum of the whole matter, and we end where we began:

“I am the Lord your God that brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

But some will say,

“We have not been brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Then it is time you were. Do not deceive yourselves with the thought,

John 8

³³ ...we were never in bondage to any man;

for

³⁴ ...whoso commits sin is the servant of sin.

One of the names of Egypt, the name which the Lord gave it, is Rahab; which means pride, boastfulness. See *Isaiah* 30:7, R.V. Egypt is a synonym for self-exaltation and defiance of God. The king of Egypt said:

Exodus 5

² Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice? I know not the Lord.

God makes Himself known to us when we are in the bondage of sin, and delivers us that we may serve Him. We cannot serve Him while we are the servants of sin, for

Matthew 6

²⁴ You cannot serve God and Mammon.

When God brings us out of bondage, we find that the commandment which we thought was a grievous yoke is liberty itself. So far is it from being a yoke of bondage, that only free men can keep it. It gives freedom;

Romans 8

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Those who seek His precepts are sure to walk at liberty. And so the commandment, instead of being an arbitrary rule, is a glorious promise. Instead of telling us merely what we must or must not do, it gives to us and makes sure to us all the holiness that it would have us render. The power by which

Rahab (Egypt) was broken (*Isaiah* 51:9-11), and all the enemies of the Lord scattered, casts out from us all strange gods.

Compare *Exodus* 20:1-3, which we have quoted so often, with *Psalms* 81:8-10. We find that God, who delivers from bondage, says:

Psalm 81

⁸ ...if you will hearken unto Me,

⁹ There shall no strange god be in you, neither shall you worship any strange god.

¹⁰ I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt: open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

We listen to Him, and we are free, and henceforth sin shall have no dominion over us. All other gods have held us in the most degrading bondage; they have made us to be hateful and unlovely. But God, who is altogether lovely, makes us free as Himself, that we may worship Him in the beauty of holiness.

Then He says, "You shall have no other gods before Me," and we delight in the assurance, for we know that He means,

"I am your God and I have called you by name; you are Mine; henceforth I will defend you from every false god; I will be responsible for your freedom, so long as you listen to My words. I will protect you from the roaring lion, and from the sin that crouches at the door. Nothing shall by any means hurt you; I will care for My own, and save you from the fury of the oppressor."

And we in turn will say,

Psalm 46

¹ God is our Refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble.

Isaiah 12

² Behold God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

The first commandment runs through the entire Decalog. It is indeed the basis of all the other commandments, and they are all but the drawing out of this one. It teaches love to God with the whole being; and “love is the fulfilling of the law.” *Romans* 13:10. To keep God’s commandments is to love Him. *1 John* 5:3. He that keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all. *James* 2:10.

Conversely, whoever really keeps one, keeps all, for the law is a unit; it is not ten separate items, but one word, given by one God. If one could keep nine parts of the law, or ninety-nine hundredths of it, and yet transgress the other part, he would show that his seeming obedience was not really obedience, but only will worship. The disregarding of one precept would show that he did not respect the authority of the law-giver, but that he simply pleases himself, as well in his seeming obedience as in his disobedience.

Exodus 20

⁴ You shall not make unto yourself any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

⁵ You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;

⁶ And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

A Perversion of the Commandment

Before we deal at length with the positive teaching of this commandment, we must notice a common misunderstanding of it. There are some who attempt to cover up their failure in some points, by an excess of zeal in something else; or else they would divert attention from something which they are

transgressing, by exaggerating some other commandment, and thus making it seem impossible to keep it. They will say, "You do not keep this," thereby implying that they are justified in not keeping the other. But the fact that some one steals is no excuse for somebody else to kill.

It is imagined by some that the second commandment forbids the making of anything whatever that is like something else. So they will either say that we cannot keep it, or else when one talks to them about the fourth commandment, for instance, they will evade the matter by pointing to some picture in your possession, and saying, "You do not keep the second commandment."

Now we must allow God to interpret His own law, and we must not accuse Him of inconsistency, or of violating it. Only a few days after this commandment was spoken, God called Moses up into the mountain, and gave him directions to make a sanctuary and vessels for service, and said to him:

Exodus 25

⁴⁰ Look that you make them after their pattern, which was shown you in the mount.

And we are expressly told that these things were "patterns of things in the heavens." *Hebrews 9:23*.

Moreover by God's express command the walls of the sanctuary were covered with pictures of cherubim, and there were two figures of cherubim, images made of beaten gold, upon the ark, which itself was a representation of God's throne.

This is sufficient to show us that the second commandment does not mean that we shall make no image of anything; indeed if some people's interpretation of the commandment were correct, it would largely stop the manufacture of machinery, or implements of agriculture. No two could be made alike, because the second would be a likeness of the first. One could not have the buttons of his clothes the same pattern.

But the commandment does not descend to such absurdities. The essence of the commandment lies in the words,

“You shall not bow down yourself to them nor serve them.”

Nothing is to be made with the idea of worshiping it.

The Roman Catholic Bible has, “You shall not adore them,” instead of “You shall not bow down to them,” and then the people are taught that it is no sin to bow down before an image. We are told that they do not worship or adore these images, but that they use them as reminders of God or of saints whom they reverence.

But the commandment says literally, according to the Hebrew, “You shall not do obeisance to them,” not bow down to nor recognize images in any way whatever as worthy of reverence. And it also forbids making any image to remind one of God; for every such thing must necessarily be infinitely below Him, and therefore must degrade the worshiper.

Changing the Truth into a Lie

This commandment grows naturally out of the first. That forbids having any God but one; this forbids the attempt to represent Him in any way whatever. We are to worship Him in person, and not some substitute for Him, nor to attempt to worship Him through something else.

In the fourth chapter of *Deuteronomy* we are told why this is so:

Deuteronomy 4

¹² The Lord spoke unto you, out of the midst of the fire; you heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only you heard a voice.

¹⁵ Take you therefore good heed unto yourselves; for you saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire;

¹⁶ Lest you corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

¹⁷ The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the air,

¹⁸ The likeness of anything that creeps on the ground; the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth;

¹⁹ And lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them.

John 1

¹⁸ No man has seen God at any time.

Therefore no man can make a representation of Him. We read that outside the Holy City, among the lost, is “whosoever loves and makes a lie.” *Revelation 22:15*. And whoever makes any image to represent God, makes a lie, because it is a misrepresentation of Him. The maker and the worshiper of a graven image has a lie in his right hand. *Isaiah 44:9-20*.

In the first chapter of *Romans* we read of the heathen that they changed the truth of God into a lie. The truth is set forth in verses 16-20. It is that the invisible things of God, namely His everlasting power and divinity, are seen in everything that He has made. But none of these things are a likeness of God. The truth was changed into a lie when men assumed that the things which reveal God were God Himself, or representations of Him.

There is a vast difference between Pantheism and God’s omnipresence, but the heathen did not discern it.

Romans 1

²¹ When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

²³ And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

Here we see how necessary this commandment is today, and in this country, as well as in Africa, China, or any other

land, and that it is as really broken in so-called Christian nations, as in the openly heathen countries. God looks upon the heart, and understands the thought afar off, and what one purposes to do is counted as the act itself.

Nay, what one has not definitely purposed to do, and is not conscious that he will do, is counted as the act already done, if the thing that he has in his mind naturally leads to it. If we have in us the spirit which would result in open sin, that is sin, for “the thought of foolishness is sin.” *Proverbs 24:9*.

Imagination and Image Making

Notice that before the heathen changed the truth of God into a lie by making images to represent Him, they “became vain in their imaginations,” trusting in themselves that they were wise.

The work of the Spirit of God is to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. *2 Corinthians 10:4-5*.

Every one, therefore, who has vain thoughts,—the imaginations of his own heart,—who trusts in his own wisdom, which is foolishness in the sight of God, is essentially an idolater.

How few have thought of the connection between an image and imagination. Before a man makes a molten or graven image, he has the form of it in his mind. The evil does not consist merely in the image made, but in the imagination of it.

2 Corinthians 8

⁴We know that an idol is nothing.

And the reason why it is nothing is that it is the product of an empty thought. Therefore “they who make them are like unto them,” for he who thinks nothing, is nothing; and every thought that is not of God is a vain thought.

This is why those who profess themselves to be wise be-

come fools. They could not think that they themselves were wise if they had the true knowledge of God. When men lose the knowledge of God, they really know nothing at all. Therefore the difference between those who make and bow down to images, and those who trust in the imagination of their own heart, is only one of outward form and circumstance.

The truth is that God's power and presence are revealed in every created thing. The lie is that every creature is a god. Men assume that the force exerted through matter is inherent in the matter. From this it is but a natural step to conclude that the power manifest in man is inherent in him, and therefore that he himself is a god.

This, instead of being elevating, is most degrading, as shown in the facts set forth in the first chapter of *Romans*. Men become like that which they worship, so when they worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator, they inevitably fall to the level and even below the level of the lowest creature.

Seeing the Invisible is the Only Safeguard

Is it not clear that this commandment forbids every vain thought, that it provides for a perfect mind, a perfect heart? Its message is identical with that to be given the last days as a preparation for the revelation of the power and glory of God in the clouds of heaven at the second coming of Christ. That message is:

Isaiah 40

⁹ ...Behold your God!

Revelation 14

⁶ And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

⁷ Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that

made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

This commandment teaches us to behold God in all His manifestations; and whoever does this can never be so foolish as to attempt to make an image of Him.

But some one will say, "We cannot see Him." Nevertheless we are to see Him, even though He is invisible. For it is the invisible things of God that are clearly seen in the things that He has made.

It was because men could not see God, that they made images to represent Him, and every one who does not see God in His works has in himself the essential elements of the transgression of the second commandment.

Matthew 5

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Not merely in the future, but now.

Psalms 19

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament show His handiwork.

God's fingerprints are upon everything that He has made. Everywhere we see the traces of His hand. We see not simply where He has been working, but we see Him actively at work. One may say with Job:

Job 23

⁸ Behold I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him;

⁹ On the left hand where He does work, but I cannot behold Him; He hides Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him.

But He is there nevertheless, for He says:

Jeremiah 23

²⁴ Do not I fill heaven and earth?

And the sole business of our lives is to behold Him, and get

acquainted with Him. This is the only safeguard against the violation of the second commandment.

Whoever gets acquainted with God, must be lost in wonder and adoration, and it is not possible for him to think of making something to represent Him, for he sees that He is an infinite God, with an infinite variety of manifestations. He learns that God is all, and he himself is nothing.

As he looks at the revelation of God, he sees as it were God expanded before his eyes, and the more he sees of Him the more fully he realizes that there is yet infinitely more to see.

Now since one must necessarily see the whole of a thing before he can make an image of it, it is plain that no one who sees God as revealed in His works can ever be so foolish as to think of making an image of Him.

In this commandment therefore we see that which is said of the whole law:

Psalm 19

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

God's "You shall," or "You shall not," is not an arbitrary decree which he issues, leaving the entire responsibility of performance with us, but is the statement of what will be the result if we allow Him to have His way with us.

He has charged Himself with our salvation, and even as He is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, so He Himself becomes responsible for the obedience of every one who sees and acknowledges Him.

Proverbs 3

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Visiting Iniquity

We have studied the part of the commandment which contains the direct precept, and must give a little attention to the last part:

Exodus 20

⁵ ...I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God; visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon, the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep my commandments.

How many have ignorantly proclaimed the injustice of this, and have railed against God for punishing the children for the iniquities of the fathers. But God does not do this, and His commandment does not say that He does. God says of the wicked man,

Ezekiel 18

¹⁴ If he beget a son that sees all his father's sins that he has done, and considers, and does not such like,

¹⁷ ...he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, but shall surely live.

¹⁸ As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo; even he shall die in his iniquity.

¹⁹ Yet say you, Why? does not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live.

²⁰ The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

The New Birth, the Way of Escape

God does not punish one person for another's sins. Note what the commandment says:

“Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children

unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me.”

Romans 5

¹² By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, [not because of his sin, but] for that all have sinned.

There was one Man who did not sin, and who knew no sin, and death did not pass upon Him. He went into the grave a victor over it. This One was the Son of God’s love. He comes to all, and as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, so that any and every child of Adam may be the Son of God’s love, even as Christ is.

Romans 5

¹⁹ For so by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.

Even as the heaven is higher than the earth, and God’s life and love are stronger than death, so the birth from above frees from all the consequences of being born from beneath. Though a man be born of the most degraded parents, he may through the Holy Spirit inherit all the goodness of God.

By the exceeding great and precious promises of God, we are made partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

God’s Way is Equal

We see therefore that God does not punish any person for the sins of another. He Himself most expressly declares that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. His grace provides for deliverance even in this present life from the physical infirmities that we have inherited from our first birth.

The term “visiting iniquity” evidently means punishment for sin, and this punishment for the sins of the fathers comes only upon those who commit the same sins. This is made very emphatic.

The question naturally arises,

“Why only to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him?”

The answer is indicated in the statement itself. It is because sin is self-destructive, and haters of God in the full sense of the term, would entirely run out in three or four generations.

When the line of demarcation is distinctly drawn between the righteous and the wicked, so that all on the one side are wholly devoted to God and filled with His Spirit, and all on the other side have sold themselves to Satan and have rejected God and His Spirit, the Lord will come to confer immortality upon the one class, and to destroy the other.

But this will be no arbitrary action. Those in the first class are not taken to heaven without seeing death, simply because they happen to be living when the Lord comes, but because they have in them the element of life, and if the Lord should not come they would continue living indefinitely, even in mortal flesh. The Lord, by conferring immortality upon them, and taking them to heaven, simply grants them the privilege of continuing their life under infinitely better conditions.

On the other hand, those who have rejected the Lord have rejected life, and have chosen death, as He says:

Proverbs 8

³⁶ All they that hate Me love death.

Sin is Self-Destructive

The destruction of the wicked is not the cutting short of their probation. When all the wicked of all generations are brought to judgment, in the day of the Lord, no one will be lost who could possibly be saved, neither will any possible future generation be cut off; for so completely will the wicked have rejected the principles of life, that there could be no succeeding generation.

If the Lord should reserve judgment, the wicked would destroy themselves by their vices and by violence. They would prey upon one another, and each one would be preyed upon by his own vices, until none were left.

So we see that the coming of the Lord is literally to the last generation of this earth. Righteousness is everlasting, but sin is only for a time. There can be no such thing as sin continuing throughout eternity, and therefore no such thing as an immortal sinner.

James 1

¹⁵ ...sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

Sin destroys itself in destroying the sinner.

1 John 2

¹⁷ The world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides for ever.

So God will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger for ever, but His mercy is “from everlasting to everlasting.” Thousands of generations will, in the ages to come, be the recipients of His mercies, which are daily new.

God's Jealousy Our Salvation

God is from everlasting to everlasting, and man becomes like that which he worships. We,

2 Corinthians 3

¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

God is a jealous God, but this by no means indicates that He has any selfish sensitiveness for His own dignity. His jealousy is our salvation. The Apostle Paul says:

2 Corinthians 11

² I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

³ But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

God is, and there is no other. And we can be, only as we are in Him. Therefore He is jealous when He sees men given to idolatry, jealous for their sakes because He sees them going to nothing.

Psalm 96

⁵ For all the gods of the heathen are idols.

Or literally “nothing.” When the work for which Christ has ascended into the heavens is accomplished, He will “fill all things.” *Ephesians* 4:10. And then there will be no room in the universe for idols or their worshipers. They shall be as though they had not been. *Obadiah* 1:16.

A great mistake is made by most people, in reading this commandment, in that they think the jealousy to be limited to visiting iniquity. Read carefully, and you will see that His jealousy is manifested, not only in visiting iniquity, but also in showing mercy to thousands of generations of them that love Him and keep His commandments.

How foolish unbelief and fear see discouragement in that which is for our comfort and hope! Instead of cringing and cowering with dread at the thought that God is a jealous God, we should rather rejoice with exceeding great joy; for it assures us that He who is the Almighty will effectually guard us from the arts of the cunning foe, who seduces in order to destroy.

Because the words are so familiar through frequent repetition, that we often take no thought of their meaning, we need to have our attention specially called to the fact that this commandment speaks love and mercy. The law is love, and they who love God keep His commandments.

1 John 5

³ This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

Upon such His mercy is seen, because they do not shake it off. They find His mercy in their loving obedience to His commandments, for

Psalm 19

¹¹ ...in keeping of them there is great reward.

Lost in the contemplation of the infinite greatness of God, His worshipers absorb Him until they are completely swallowed up in Him, then whoever looks at them can see not them, but God who is all and in all.

God is jealous for the glory and welfare of His people; He desires their minds to be clear, their souls purified, and their lives continued throughout eternity.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

We need not spend much time over the common idea of the violation of this commandment, that which is most obvious, and generally recognized. There are probably very few of those who read this who are guilty of what is ordinarily known as profane swearing. This is considered vulgar, and not in good taste, even by those who are not Christians.

Most people think that, they keep this commandment, even though they may realize that they are guilty in respect to some of the others. So the majority of what are called respectable people might conclude that they have no special need of this commandment.

But it is here, in the midst of God's law, and is one of the commandments that stand fast for ever, and therefore it concerns every soul.

God Hears the Thought

The Word of God is a discerner of the thought and intents of the heart. When we get that fact before us, there is probably not one of us that will not have to plead guilty to violating this commandment, both in spirit and in letter.

We have already found that sin is not merely the thing done, but that within which impels the deed. The Lord looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart, and on the thoughts and intents.

Psalms 139

¹ O Lord, you have searched me, and known me.

² ...you understand my thought afar off.

The faintest thought sounds as distinctly in the ears of God as the loudest speech. There is encouragement for us in this truth, if we know the Lord. He understands the unspoken longing just as well as the most fervent prayer. This is not a thing to be dreaded, but a glorious comfort, to know that God understands the innermost thought of the soul.

The Essence of Profanity

People who swear usually do so when they are irritated; thus they give vent to their passion. How many of us who do not use profane language have likewise been angry and irritated? We did not use the name of the Lord, but we had in us that which manifested himself in those who are accustomed to swearing.

Now the outward manifestation is largely a matter of circumstance, training, and education. If we have been brought up in society where swearing is considered vulgar, and so have never fallen into the habit, or if we refrain from the use of profane words because the use of them might result in the loss of reputation, then our not swearing when we become angry is no virtue. Our angry feelings have every element of evil that there is in others, who add the expression of profane words.

There is a thing that has been by someone called “wooden swearing,” as when an angry person gives vent to his feelings by stamping on the floor, striking the table, kicking a chair, or slamming the door. While this is not technically a violation of the commandment, it is each in reality, as all will be able to see when they consider the breadth of this precept.

Substitutes for Oaths

These are many words and expressions that are substituted for the actual name of deity, which are not more than one degree removed, if they are at all, from gross profanity. If you

should, in reading this paper, come across the expression, “My goodness gracious!” or should hear a minister use it in his sermon, would you not be shocked? You would think it very much out of place, and that such a thing was unbecoming a preacher or teacher.

But why should any of us at home, or in private, use words that would be out of place anywhere in the world? They are simply a substitute for the words which another man uses who has been brought up differently.

The Lord has proclaimed His name:

Exodus 34

⁶ ...merciful and gracious,...abundant in goodness and truth.

These qualities are attributes of God, so that to use the words, mercy, gracious, goodness, and the like, as mere expletives, is literally to take the name of the Lord in vain. Whether there is any difference in the degree between the sin of using these words, and taking the ordinarily recognized titles of deity, God alone can tell; but there certainly is none in kind, and whether a person uses one or the other is largely a matter of habit. For every idle, unnecessary word we shall give account in the day of Judgment:

Matthew 12

³⁶ But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Matthew 5

³⁷ Let your communication be Yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these comes of evil.

Thoughtless Habits

“But I say these things without thinking,” one says. Then think! God has given us minds, in order that we may think, and not do anything thoughtlessly. We should have a reason for everything we do, and for our habits. Though an act or

word may come involuntarily, we should have a reason for the formation of the habit. Our habits must be formed by the Word and Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit, having created us new creatures, must dwell within us, speaking through us. When this is the case, there will be no fear that we shall take the name of the Lord in vain. We all have need to pray,

Psalm 112

³ Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.

Anybody can keep himself from the gross form of swearing, the obvious violation of the commandment, even though he have not the fear of God before his eyes. Almost every swearer knows that this is true, if he will but consider a moment, for all except those who are utterly abandoned abstain in certain society from the utterance of their common oaths.

A young man once apologized to the writer for swearing at some provoking circumstance, saying that he could not help it. But he readily agreed that he could help it, when reminded that he would not have used the expression if ladies had been present. But, as we have already seen, the abstaining from what is ordinarily reckoned as vulgar swearing, does not meet the requirement of the commandment.

Only the Spirit of God can enable us fully to keep the law, because the law is spiritual. The Spirit is however abundantly able to keep us from every form of sin. So let nobody say of this or any other commandment, "I cannot keep it!" God has given us the power, for He has given us Himself.

He made men to be kings, and though we have been slaves, He has through the Spirit proclaimed our emancipation, and forever delivered us from the necessity of saying, "I can't." "I can't" means slavery.

2 Corinthians 3

¹⁷ Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

And the Spirit will be given to all. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall keep the commandments, and be at liberty.

All Sin is Blasphemy

This commandment forbids all unnecessary use of the Lord's name, even in prayer. It shuts off "vain repetitions," and cant phrases, which people get in the habit of using without any thought of their meaning. It teaches us that we should use the name of the Lord only with a definite purpose, and with a clear understanding of why we use it.

That which one causes another to do, is counted as though he did it himself. Paul, addressing the Jews which were "instructed out of the law," and made their boast in the law, yet who through breaking it dishonored God, said:

Romans 2

¹⁷ Behold, you are called a Jew, and rest in the law, and make your boast of God,

¹⁸ And know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

¹⁹ And are confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

²⁰ An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

²¹ You therefore which teach another, do you not teach yourself? you that preach a man should not steal, do you steal?

²² You that say a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? you that abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege?

²³ You that make your boast of the law, through breaking the law do you dishonor God?

²⁴ For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

In like manner the prophet Nathan said to David after his adultery and murder:

2 Samuel 12

¹⁴ By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

No man's sin can end with himself. It is impossible for a man to sin, even in secret, without influencing somebody also against the Lord. So here again we see the exceeding breadth of the commandment, and how impossible it is to violate this third commandment without breaking the whole law.

And, on the other hand, we see how every sin is a violation of the third commandment. So when we read:

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,”

we way know that it is equivalent to,

“You shall do no evil.”

Remember this when we come to speak of the still broader meaning of the commandment. The Apostle James, speaking of those who dishonor their Maker by reproaching the poor, says:

James 2

⁶ Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

⁷ Do not they blaspheme that worthy name, by the which you are called?

The church stands in the same relation to the Lord that the wife does to the husband. Christ is the Head of each individual Christian. The professor of Christianity takes His name, and should be absolutely one with Him, so that Christ's life is the only life seen.

Now if God is not given the supreme place in the life, and the individual's sinful self is exhibited under the name of Christ, it is plainly seen that the Lord is dishonored. Neighbors look at the professor, and say that there is no power in Christianity. They blaspheme the name of God, saying that He

is not able to keep those who trust in Him.

Thus people who have never taken an oath in their lives are guilty of breaking the third commandment. Many professed Christians are unconsciously taking the name of the Lord in vain.

A Gracious Promise

This thought naturally brings us to a wider and more glorious phase of the commandment than is usually comprehended. The third commandment is ordinarily regarded simply as a stern decree, as though God said,

“Don’t you dare use My name lightly, or else I will punish you.”

Men have robbed the commandment of all the love, all the joy, all the light, and peace, and comfort that it contains. It is even so with the whole law, which by many professed Christians is looked upon as a table of stern decrees, the justice of which they acknowledge, but which they regard as irksome.

The blessing of Moses, the man of God, in *Deuteronomy 23*, shows that the law was given in love, and that it is an expression of the love of God.

Deuteronomy 33

² The Lord came from Sinai...from His right hand went a fiery law for them.

³ Yea, He loved the people...

When received as it is given to us, in the hand of a Mediator, it conveys to us nothing of harshness, but everything pure, tender, gentle, sweet, and easy, and that tends to lift up, strengthen, and bless. It is a blessed promise, that if we hear, we shall be preserved from taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Every commandment of God is a promise God has pledged Himself that every believer shall be kept from taking His

name in vain,—that is, that every believer shall keep the whole law, doing nothing that can in any way dishonor God.

Exodus 20

⁷ ...the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

This is a negative statement, the positive form of which would be:

“The Lord will hold him guiltless that does not take His name in vain.”

Is not that grand? The person who keeps the third commandment is counted guiltless before God.

Romans 4

⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin.

And He does not impute sin to the man who does not take His name in vain.

Taking the Name

Exodus 20

⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

Think a moment of the word “take.” It means to lift up, to bear, not simply to utter. We are to take the name of God, else there would be no force in the commandment not to take it in vain. But the blessedness of the commandment lies in the assurance that when we take it, it will not be in vain. It will accomplish something for us. It will make and keep us guiltless, for:

Proverbs 18

¹⁰ The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it, and is safe.

An illustration of this is given in the third and fourth chapters of *Acts*. In the third chapter we have the record of the

healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. He never had walked, but when Peter said to him,

Acts 3

⁶ ...In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

⁸ And he leaping up stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

When the multitude gathered round in amazement, Peter said:

¹³ The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus;...

¹⁵ ...whom God has raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.

¹⁶ And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Then the next day, when the Apostles were brought before the Jewish Council, Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them:

Acts 4 [RV, margin]

⁸ You rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

⁹ If we this day be examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man, in which he is made whole,

¹⁰ Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in Him does this man stand here before you whole.

¹² And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, whereby we must be saved.

This miracle gives us a vivid illustration of what it is to *not* take the name of the Lord in vain.

Salvation in the Name

There is salvation in that name.

Matthew 1

²¹ ...you shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.

His name is what He Himself is. Note the words used by Peter:

Acts 4

¹⁰ ...in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified,...even in Him does this man stand before you whole.

That is to say, that to stand in the name of Jesus is to stand in Jesus. The name is the person. God is the Saviour, and His name is in Christ.

Not Magic, but Reality

The name of the Lord is not to be taken as a charm; it is not magic, but reality. When Paul was at Ephesus, wonderful miracles were wrought by him in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 19

¹³ Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them that had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We abjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches.

¹⁴ And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said: Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?

¹⁶ And the men in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them; and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

¹⁷ And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

So we see that it is not some utterance of the name that is of value, but the recognition of the being and character of the

Lord.

His Name is His Character

His personality, and cannot be separated from Himself. Names of men and things with us are mere matters of convenience and fancy; they mean nothing. And this is doubtless one reason why people do not better understand the force of

Deuteronomy 28

⁵⁸ ...that glorious and fearful name, the Lord your God.

To take the name of God in reality is to take the life and experience the power of it.

Psalms 9

¹⁰ They that know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken them that seek You.

God has never failed any person; we may go to Him in the name that is above every name, asking for His own sake to take away our sins, and to cleanse us, and we shall never be disappointed. What a blessed promise!

Exodus 20

⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The Lord says to the one who trusts Him,

Psalms 91

¹⁴ I will set him on high, because he has known My name; he shall call upon Me and I will answer him;

¹⁵ I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.

Baptized into the Name

The disciples of Jesus are baptized:

Matthew 28 [RV]

¹⁹ ...into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

To be baptized into the name of the Lord is to be swallowed up in His life, so that one can say,

Galatians 2

²⁰ ...I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Since the life is the life of Christ, it is perfectly proper for the person to bear the name of Christ, just as the wife bears the name of her husband. We are joined by death to Christ in a bond that nothing can break:

Romans 8

³⁸ ...neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature.

His name is our salvation. We are baptized into it, and it is the strong tower, into which we run and are safe. So again we rejoice in the assurance given in the third commandment:

Exodus 20

⁷ You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Praying in the Name

We are exhorted:

Galatians 3

¹⁷ Whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

So we are to pray in His name, and the assurance is,

John 14

¹⁴ If you shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.

There are many unconscious forgers at the bank of heaven. How many there are who in their prayers use the expressions, “in Jesus’ name,” and, “for Jesus’ sake,” without a thought of what they mean. Thus they take the name in vain. They come with the name of the Lord without the Lord Himself.

When we truly bear the name of Jesus, we are sunk out of sight, for it is He who lives, and not we, and it is He in us asking that He may be delivered from the power of sin in our flesh. He is dwelling in our flesh, in order that He may cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

Hebrews 5

⁷ In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.

He was saved from death, in that He was saved from sin. He “suffered in the flesh, being tempted” (*1 Peter* 4:1, *Hebrews* 2:18), but He suffered not for Himself. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and it was the infirmities of our sinful flesh that oppressed His soul.

He is still pleading in sinful flesh, presenting His life in our behalf, and longing to be relieved from the burden of sin with which we make Him serve.

How can a guilty sinner, already convicted of law-breaking, appear before the Lord, in the presence of that law that sends forth thunder and lightning, and a storm of indignation upon the wicked? He dare not; but he need not, for it is not he, but Christ.

Knowing and confessing that Christ is come in the flesh, the sinner comes with boldness to the throne of grace, for he comes in the name—in the person—of Jesus. If he truly believes in the name of Jesus, it is Christ using his tongue to utter the petition; and when he knows this, he can always make his requests with thanksgiving, no matter with how strong crying and tears his supplications be made; for Christ in the days of His flesh obtained deliverance from those very sins.

So when I use that name, I must claim all that the name comprehends. Christ never offered a petition in vain. He said,

John 11

⁴¹ Father, I thank You that You have heard Me;

⁴² And I know that You hear Me always.

Whatever we ask in His name indeed, will be granted. God will clear and hold guiltless every soul who takes that name for all that it means. Such a one will not take it in vain.

Stamped with the Name

Numbers 6

²² The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying,

²³ Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise you shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,

²⁴ The Lord bless you, and keep you;

²⁵ The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;

²⁶ The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

²⁷ And you shall put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

The name of the Lord is mercy and grace and peace. This name put upon the soul, keeps it. The Lord says of the one who believes Him, and thus has the victory that has overcome the world,

Revelation 3

¹² I will write upon Him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God,...and My new name.

So the trusting soul will be as safe as the New Jerusalem, and as God Himself. He says,

Malachi 3

¹⁶ They that feared the Lord spoke one with another, and the Lord hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.

¹⁷ And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts.

Those who trust in the name have the name written upon

them, and that shows to whom they belong. This is a pledge of safety, for the Lord will keep His own. His name upon us shows that we are His property, and He will defend us with His life against all adversaries.

The devil knows the name of the Lord, and trembles at its power. He knows that God has put a hedge about every soul who trusts in His name. Though Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, we are safe so long as we abide in the name of the Lord; and that name abides for ever.

Psalm 120

² They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides for ever.

What a glorious promise, then, is the commandment that we shall never take the name of the Lord our God in vain!

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

⁹ Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;

¹⁰ But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your man servant nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates;

¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

The Origin of “Difficulties in Scripture Interpretation”

This commandment, like every other, is exceeding broad, and we can never exhaust it. Yet, with all its breadth and depth, it is exceedingly simple and easy to be understood.

Nevertheless, it is very much misunderstood, and many professed Christians seem to find great difficulty in it. Because of the general perversion of this commandment, it is necessary to clear the ground of some misapprehensions, before we come to the consideration of the real teaching of it.

The difficulties connected with this commandment, like those with any part of the Bible, are wholly in the minds of men, and not in the commandment itself. Perverted minds pervert the word.

Whoever comes to the study of the Bible, wholly free from prejudice or selfish motives, with a sincere desire that he may learn the will of God in order to do it, will never find any difficulty in it; for

John 7

¹⁷ If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.

All the difficulties of “interpretation” lie in this: People

come to the Bible with more or less fixed opinions of what is right. They take it for granted that the ideas and practices that they have received by tradition from their fathers, and which are common among men, must be right.

But they find things in the Bible that do not sanction their course, and since their minds are not open to change, they feel it necessary to make the Bible harmonize with their practice. Bible study is very difficult under such conditions.

Which Day?

Although the commandment states the case in the plainest language, there is a great deal of questioning as to which day is the Sabbath. Nothing could be more simple and direct than this:

Exodus 20

¹⁰ But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.

But the majority of professed Christians observe the first day, calling it the Sabbath, and hence arises one of the difficulties to which we have just referred.

It is true that many observers of Sunday have not found any difficulty over it, because they suppose that it is the seventh day spoken of in the commandment. Their attention has never been called to the matter, or else they would see the fallacy of their supposition; for if you ask them why they observe Sunday, they will say that it is in honor of Christ's resurrection, which they know took place on the first day of the week. "The Sabbath day according to the commandment" is the day before the first day of the week. *Luke 23:56, 24:1*. Hence it is the seventh day of the week.

It is very plain, therefore, that the fourth commandment as given by the Lord from Mount Sinai requires the observance of the seventh day of the week, and that the observance of the first day of the week by professed Christians is not warranted by it. There is no revised edition of the commandment, for

God's Word is settled in heaven for ever, and Christ said,

Matthew 5

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

But some say,

“It all depends on where you begin to count; if you begin to count with the second day, you make Sunday the seventh; or if you should begin with Wednesday, you would make the third day the seventh.”

The fallacy of this statement should be apparent to everyone. If a man has seven sons, you cannot make the firstborn the seventh by any process of counting. Call them what you please, the firstborn is still the first son, and the last one born is the seventh. Calling black white does not make it white. Calling the first day the seventh does not make it the Sabbath; it still remains the first day, and one of “the six working days.” The same principle applies to the seventh day; no matter what men call it, or where they begin their count of days, it still remains the seventh day, which “is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.”

At the very time the law was spoken from Mount Sinai, when God said, “Remember the Sabbath day,” He was making it plain that the Sabbath is a definite day, and that it was not left to man to choose which day it should be, nor how it should be kept.

The giving of the manna emphasized the sacredness of the day, and showed its definiteness. For forty years manna fell six days in the week; on the seventh day none fell, but the lack was made up by a double portion being given on the sixth day. While ordinarily the manna that fell one day could not be kept till the next day without spoiling, the extra por-

tion given on the sixth day was sweet and good for use on the seventh. Nobody could change the day, or was free to choose for himself.

Do We Know the Original Seventh Day?

But some tell us that the reckoning of days has been lost, and since we cannot know which is the original seventh day, one day is as likely to be right as another. Such objectors forget that the Word of God “lives and abides for ever.”

The commandment speaks to us as directly as it did to the Israelites gathered about Mount Sinai. It is not four thousand years old, but is new every day. We have no more ground for saying that we cannot tell which is the Sabbath day according to the commandment, than the Israelites had when they heard it spoken.

God does not command impossibilities, and the fact that He still speaks to us in His commandment, requiring the observance of the seventh day, is evidence enough that it can be kept. But to take away every shade of doubt, and to show positively that the original Sabbath cannot possibly have been lost, we will briefly trace its history.

In the beginning God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it (*Genesis 2:13*); and this is given in the commandment as the reason why we should observe it. God makes no mistakes, and never gets confused in His reckoning, so we may know that the Israelites in the desert had the identical seventh day upon which God rested.

During all their history they were in direct communication with God by means of prophets, and the fact that they never lost their reckoning of the days is shown from the frequent reproofs God sent them for their violation of the Sabbath.

Finally they were carried into captivity because of their transgression of the commandment; but God would not have punished them for disobedience if it had been impossible for

them to know the truth.

After their return from captivity they were very scrupulous in their observance of the Sabbath, at least outwardly. Then Christ came, God's Representative, and the Giver of the law. If the Jews had lost a reckoning, He would have set them right. But He recognized the day they were observing as the Sabbath day, and reproved them only because they made it a yoke of bondage, instead of the blessing that God designed it to be.

Shortly after Christ's ascension the Jews were dispersed, and ever since they have been found in every part of the world. But they have remained faithful to the tradition of Sabbath keeping, and no matter how widely separated, they all still observe one and the same day.

It is absolutely impossible that all should have lost the reckoning of days, and all made exactly the same mistake at the same time, so that nobody ever detected it.

It is plain, therefore, that all that is required in order that one may know that he has the identical seventh day on which God rested, and in regular succession from the creation, is the ability to count seven.

The Essence of the Commandment

Whoever reads the Bible with care will notice that there is never any suggestion of the possibility of doubt as to which day is the Sabbath. The whole burden of the Scripture is as to its nature, and the manner of its observance.

Exodus 20

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

We are not required to make it holy; God himself did that in the beginning, to which the commandment refers us. When the heavens and the earth were finished, God

Genesis 2

² ...rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had

made.

³ And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.

To sanctify is to make holy. The same word is used in the commandment as in *Genesis 2:3*. The idea prevails quite generally that men can keep any day holy, that they can make any day holy on which they choose to rest. This is a grave error.

Only He who can create can make holy. For any man to claim that he can make a day holy, is to put himself in the place of God, claiming equal power with the Creator. When God says, "Hallow My Sabbaths," He does not ask us to do what He has already done, but to recognize it and conform to it.

It is not for the benefit of the Sabbath itself that we are required to keep it holy.

Mark 2

²⁸ The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Those who observe Sunday often bewail the little regard that is paid to it by the mass of people, saying, "We have no Sabbath;" and so they ask for laws to protect it. In these efforts to enforce Sunday observance by law, they disclaim any wish to make people religious by law, but say that they merely want protection for the day, as though people could injure a day by anything that they do on it.

He who knows the true Sabbath day will never have any such thoughts about it. And our keeping it does not add any sacredness to the day, and our violating it does not make any difference in its sanctity. The Sabbath is not a fragile thing that must be kept in a case, lest it be broken to pieces by rough usage. It does not need to be protected: it itself is a protection for those who keep it.

Psalm 91

⁴ ...His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

It is never true that we have no Sabbath. If every man on earth violated the Sabbath, it would still remain the same holy day. You cannot abolish the Sabbath day, any more than you can abolish God.

Recall the text quoted in our study of the first commandment:

Joshua 24

¹⁹ You cannot serve the Lord: for He is a holy God.

John 4 [RV, margin]

²⁴ God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

The law is spiritual (*Romans 7:14*), and only those who are spiritual can keep it. John was keeping the Sabbath according to the commandment when he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” No one can serve God unless he is holy. We are to:

Psalm 29

² ...worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Does that shut anybody off from serving Him? No; this is the blessing of the Sabbath day:

Ezekiel 20

¹² I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.

God gives us the Sabbath, to make us know and remember that He has the power to make us holy, so that we can serve Him acceptably. God sanctifies man by His creative power, in order that they may keep the whole law. To keep the Sabbath holy, therefore, is the sum of all commandment keeping.

The New Creation

The Sabbath was instituted at the close of creation. It is the

memorial of God's creative power.

Psalm 111

² The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.

³ His work is honorable and glorious; and His righteousness endures for ever.

⁴ He has made His wonderful works to be remembered.

This last statement would be better rendered,

“He has made a memorial for His wonderful works.”

In the “song for the Sabbath day,” the Psalmist says,

Psalm 92

⁴ ...I will triumph in the works of Your hands.

God alone works righteousness.

Psalm 145

¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works.

Ephesians 2 [RV]

¹⁰ We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God before prepared that we should walk in them.

The Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (*Romans* 1:16) and His everlasting power is seen in all the things that He has made. Therefore the power of the Gospel is to create, to make new.

2 Corinthians 5 [RV, margin]

¹⁸ If any man is in Christ there is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold they are become new.

¹⁹ But all things are of God.

In Christ “is our redemption” because “in Him were all things created.” *Colossians* 1:14-16. He is Redeemer because He is Creator, and redemption is creation. It is a complete and perfect work. Christ's last words on the cross were, “It is finished!” *John* 19:30.

The cross of Christ brings those who accept it into the condition in which man was at the close of the sixth day of creation, when God saw everything that He had made, “and behold it was very good.”

Therefore, since the Sabbath is the mark or seal of a perfect new creation, it is the seal of the Gospel, the sign of the cross, the pledge of the complete redemption of all things.

“Remember”

Exodus 20

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

When shall we remember it? Many seem to think that the commandment merely requires them to remember it on Friday, so as to be able to get their work out of the way, and be ready to sit down and rest at the setting of the sun. This is well, but it is infinitely below what the commandment says.

The word is absolute and unlimited. We are to remember it all the time, everyday in the week. We are always to remember the sanctifying power which it reveals, in order that we may continually worship God “in the beauty of holiness,” “lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.” *1 Timothy 2:8*.

Knowing that only those who are holy can truly worship a holy God and keep a holy day, we must remember the Sabbath which makes known God the sanctifier, and then when the Sabbath day comes to us, we shall be ready for it.

It comes bringing a blessing; for God “blessed the seventh day.” It is frequently said, with a view to avoiding the force of the commandment, that we may have a blessing at any time. Some say, “I keep every day holy.” Now we not only may, but should, experience the blessing of God every day. But a blessing upon us, is not the same as a blessing upon the day.

As we have already seen, we cannot keep any day holy ex-

cept the one which God has made holy. Our actions or condition has no effect upon it; but the day is given to us to affect us.

Do not forget that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” *Mark 2:27*. No man’s holiness can impart holiness to any day; but the Sabbath was given that we might partake of the holiness of God, and be kept holy every day. While God blesses us every day, there is a special blessing on the seventh day, even the blessing of the Sabbath, and this blessing assures to us all the blessings that we may have on any other day.

The Blessing of Eden

The Sabbath is a fragment of Eden that comes down to us untouched by the curse. It is the bridge by which men may pass from Eden lost to Eden restored, freed from the intervening curse.

It is the rest to which Christ calls all who labor and are heavy laden. By it we become sharers of His burden, which is light, for He lays upon us only a “weight of glory.” *2 Corinthians 4:17*. So the Sabbath, when kept in the Spirit, brings to us the glory of that new creation when “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (*Job 38:7*), and is the pledge of the time when all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

Although Eden has been taken from the earth, that it might not suffer the effects of the curse, the reality of it is left us in the Sabbath, that we may come back to the beginning, and find in the beginning the end, “even the salvation of our souls.” *1 Peter 1:9*.

The reason why now, at this time, we have the Sabbath made clear as never before in this world’s history, is because Eden is about to be restored, and we must be made ready for the change. When Christ comes, He appears not as a stranger,

but as one with whom we are well acquainted, and He will conduct us to Eden, not a strange country, but a familiar home. To this end God has given us the Sabbath, the essential part of Eden.

There is to be a change now day by day, through the sanctifying power that the Sabbath makes us know and remember, so that at last when we get to Eden we shall not have to get used to our surroundings. Before the last day comes, we shall have drunk of the river of Eden, and eaten of the hidden manna.

Psalm 36

⁸ They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Your house; and You shall make them drink of the river of Your pleasures [or, literally: “the river of Your Eden”].

Rest Not a Burden

Sometimes when we talk about Sabbath-keeping, people will say, as though they were telling something new:

“Oh, but keeping the Sabbath will not save us; we are saved by faith, not by works.”

Exactly; and that is what the Sabbath teaches us. We keep the Sabbath, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved. Sabbath-keeping is rest in God, the assurance of His finished work.

John 6

²⁹ This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent.

By believing, we receive the perfect works which God Himself has prepared for us to walk in. These works were finished from the foundation of the world. Therefore whoever receives them must find perfect rest, because when the work is done and well done, rest must necessarily follow.

Hebrews 4

⁹ There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.

Note, it is the people of God who have the rest.

Hebrews 4

³ We which have believed do enter into rest.

And they which do not believe, cannot rest. There can be no perfect Sabbath-keeping without perfect faith in God, which means perfect righteousness, because we are justified by faith. So the Sabbath means preeminently justification by faith.

Although there are many believers in Christ who observe Sunday, thinking it to be the Sabbath, it is nevertheless a fact that Sunday-keeping stands as a sign of attempted justification by works. It is the attempt of man to do the work which only God can do, namely, sanctify a day; for God never sanctified any day except the seventh day, so that all the sanctity Sunday has is what man has put upon it.

He who can sanctify one thing can sanctify anything, because he must have the sanctifying power in himself. So the idea that man can make any day holy, involves the idea that he can make himself holy, that is, justify himself by his own works; its principle is that man has holiness in himself. Sunday-keeping is therefore the sign of the man of sin who “exalts himself against God.”

The Sabbath is rest; that is the meaning of the word. The word “Sabbath” is the untranslated Hebrew word for “rest.” It would be well if it had been translated into our language, instead of transferred. The word “Sabbath” conveys to the Hebrew mind exactly what the English word “rest” does to ours. So we may read:

“Remember the rest day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the rest of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.”

How can anybody call this a burden? Rest is not a burden; to cease from labor is not wearisome; rest, absolute, perfect

rest, the rest that cannot be disturbed by anything on earth, is the sum of all blessings. He who knows the Sabbath indeed can never count it a burden to keep it. Such a one will never say:

“I could not make a living if I should keep the Sabbath.”

Because the Sabbath reveals God, in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.” *Acts 17:28*. It reveals Him who delivers from the power of darkness, and the curse and burdens and perplexities of this present evil world, and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son, making known to us the power and the joy of the world to come.

Then remember it, and keep it, that you may know the sweetness of rest in the bosom of the Father, and delight yourself in the Lord.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹² Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you.

The most obvious meaning of the commandment, the duty of children to their parents, need not occupy our attention at this time, since everybody recognizes and understands that. Everybody quotes the fifth commandment to impress upon children the necessity for obedience.

Let us then dwell on that which is little thought of, on a phase of the commandment not usually recognized. In *Ephesians* 6:1-3, the fifth commandment is quoted, and in the fourth verse we are made to see the responsibility resting on parents in connection with it. We learn that it applies to them equally with their children.

Parents are in the place of God to the children whom He gives them. For the first few years at least the whole responsibility rests on the parents to see that the children keep this as well as the other commandments. If the parent does his part well, the children will certainly do theirs, for God says, speaking of the same promise that is referred to in the commandment:

Isaiah 59

²⁰ The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob.

²¹ As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord: My Spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

So then the faithful parent can say:

Isaiah 8

¹⁸ Behold I and the children whom You have given me.

The Admonition of the Lord

In immediate connection with the commandment the Apostle says:

Ephesians 6

⁴ And fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

That is, nourish them, bring them up, cultivate them, train them as plants, in the way that they should go. The word “admonition” will bear study. It is composed of two Greek words, one of which means *mind*, and the other, *to place*. Admonition, therefore, means *placing in the mind*.

One must know the admonition of the Lord in order to bring his children up in it. God does not admonish as most people do; unfortunately men very commonly judge of the Lord’s admonition by their own, instead of learning from God how they ought to do. God’s covenant is,

Hebrews 8

¹⁰ ...I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.

He sends His Spirit to place the law in the heart and life. This is the admonition, the “putting in mind” of the Lord. As God gently breathes the Spirit into the soul, thus placing there His righteous law, so the parent is to instill loyalty and obedience into the mind of the child, for the parent stands in the place of God, and in its earliest infancy must reveal to it all that it knows of God.

Some Illustrations

Two cases will show how very much parents are concerned in this commandment. God said of Abraham,

Genesis 18

¹⁹ I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him.

God was made known to Abraham, in order that Abraham might make Him known to his children. The result of this was that God could bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him. Suppose that Abraham had not known the law of life, and had not trained his household according to it. What then? He himself would have lost the promise.

So we see that parents are concerned in this commandment as much as children possibly can be. If they should not do their duty, there would be no possession of the promised land. But the parents are not to rule by arbitrary authority, because they are bigger and stronger, because they support the children, or because they wish their dignity and authority to be respected. No; the parent is to rule even as God does, who gives His law by His Spirit in the hand of a Mediator, gently establishing a bond of union by which the law may flow from Him to us.

The case of Eli presents a view of the opposite course, and taken in connection with the case of Abraham, shows that, if we can make any comparison, it is a more fearful thing for parents to have disobedient children, than for the children to be disobedient.

God expects the children of His people to be His also. Eli was God's high priest, but he had wicked sons; He knew of their wickedness, and remonstrated with them, saying,

1 Samuel 2

²³ Why do you such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people.

²⁴ Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear; you make the Lord's people to transgress.

But his sons paid no heed to this mild remonstrance, and the Lord said to Samuel:

1 Samuel 3

² I will perform against Eli all the things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end.

³ For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knows; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not.

Eli did not learn from the Lord how to govern, and he lost much by it. Abraham had learned the lesson from God, and it was eternal gain to him.

There is another phase of the commandment that is scarcely ever thought of.

Exodus 20

¹² Honor your father and your mother.

To whom does this speak? There is no limit; it speaks to every one who has or has ever had a father and a mother, that is, it speaks to all mankind without exception. This commandment is not limited to children; it speaks to the man of fourscore as well as to the child of four.

Someone may say:

“I have no father or mother; they are dead; how can I honor them?”

Just the same as though they were alive; indeed it is often the case that people do not learn to honor their parents until after they are dead.

A person never in his life gets into a condition where this commandment does not apply to him. He may never have known father or mother; they may have died the day he was born. Yet the commandment still speaks to him, “Honor your father and your mother.”

The Commandment Universal

Still more: it makes no difference about the character of the father or mother; they may have been the most depraved characters, nevertheless the commandment speaks:

“Honor your father and your mother.”

It is not the child simply, that is the index of the parent, but so long as a person lives, his character reflects upon his ancestry. Even though a man’s parents have not done their duty by him, have neglected or ill-treated him, and have trained him in habits of sin rather than of righteousness, still his duty is to honor them. How? you will ask; must he implicitly obey and always follow their evil teachings? Not by any means. That would not be honoring them. He must honor them by his upright life.

Whenever a man lives an honorable life, the name which he bears is honored, and his father is thus honored through him. People who have not known his parents will naturally conclude that he must have come from a good stock; and even though they have known them, and have considered them to be worthless characters, yet seeing the right character developed in the son, they will think that there must have been some good in them, after all.

Of course, the good all comes from the Lord, yet God Himself desires that the parents should share in the honor, even as He would have them cooperate with Him in the development of right characters in their children.

No man can live a base, ignoble life without bringing dishonor upon his parents; but if he himself yields to the redeeming grace of God, he redeems to some extent, at least among men, the character of his parents.

The Universal Father

So this commandment simply says to every soul on earth,

Be good: do that which is right and true; honor God, the Universal Father, the One from whom all fatherhood comes. We are His offspring, and He is the One who is to be honored above all in the honoring of our parents, and nothing that is dishonoring to God can possibly be honoring to the parent.

Psalm 27

¹⁰ When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

Our duty to our parents when they are living, is simply our duty to God through them, and if they are dead, the relationship still continues the same to God.

Isaiah 66

¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you.

God Himself is the fulness, the reality, of all human relationships.

We see that this commandment is exceeding broad; it not only embraces the whole relation of children to parents and of parents to children but the whole of every person's life.

If there be any difference, it applies to the parent more emphatically than to the child, for the parents have a duty first, in order that the child may honor them in obedience to this commandment.

God who gives to us the promise of the eternal inheritance, expects us to live in this world in a way becoming the inheritance.

Colossians 1

¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;

¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;

¹³ Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

He expects us by the grace He has given us to live in this

world as we shall continue to live in the world to come. We are to live now as in Eden. That does not mean that there should be no family and social life; quite the contrary, since the family began in Eden. It matters not that we are in a sin-cursed earth, with sinful flesh. The Lord Jesus, in whom was no sin, and who knew no sin, was

Galatians 4

⁴ ...born of a woman, born under the law,

⁵ To redeem them that were under the law.

And He has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

Galatians 4

²⁸ We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

The promise referred to in the fifth commandment, which is the reward for obedience to it, is the power by which we obey it; for the exceeding great and precious promises make us...

2 Peter 1

⁴ ...partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Being made partakers of the Divine nature, we honor the Father in heaven, and so all earthly relations. The possibility of this perfect childhood is shown not alone in the case of Jesus:

- John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb;
- Samuel, asked of the Lord, and devoted to His service from his birth;
- Jeremiah, ordained of God to be a prophet before he was born.

All these cases show us what is possible, and what God would have for every child. It is the birthright of every child born on the earth, the right purchased for us by Christ and made possible for every one in Him. Every child born with

less has been deprived of his due, and has received an injury.

These things recognized would prevent any parent from delaying the training of his child. Most parents seem to think that the child is not capable of receiving training before it is four or five years old. It is marvelous how much an infant in arms can understand. Think of the breadth of mind that Jesus, the model child, had at twelve years of age, and you will realize that His mind must have begun to develop at a very early period.

Someone will ask, how soon a child should be corrected. The answer is, just as soon as it is old enough to show self-will.

“But that would be cruel!”

No; not cruelty, but kindness. The admonition must be suited to the age. The younger the child, the more easily is it trained in the right way. The cruelty comes in only in neglecting this training until the child has reached an age when severe measures become necessary, and when even these will not avail.

Proverbs 22

⁶Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

This is an unqualified promise. If a person goes astray, we may be sure he has not had the proper training in his childhood. God expects that the child of every Christian shall grow up His own child. He is to be trained to recognize authority. Having learned the principles of obedience he will obey God.

But if we have failed in this, we need not despair. God enables us to redeem the past; He forgives sins of ignorance and unbelief and neglect, and saves that which has been lost. Although we have been deprived of our birthright, we need not be despondent, for by the new birth all the disabilities of the first birth are canceled.

We are heirs of God, who undertakes our bringing up, breathes His life and character into us, and superintends our education. Let us then honor Him by our faith in His promises, and He will honor us with His salvation.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹⁸ You shall not kill.

It is very likely that most of those who read this would be inclined to say:

“This have I kept from my youth up.”

The number of people who with malice or by force take the life of any fellow-creatures is comparatively small, and therefore then is undoubtedly a feeling among most people that this commandment does not specially concern them.

They acknowledge, of course, that it is right, but do not think that they have ever fallen under its condemnation; they are not conscious of ever having had even a desire to kill anybody, and so they assume that so far as they are concerned this commandment need never have been given.

But again we must be reminded of the fact that the commandment is exceeding broad, and that this one is no less broad than the preceding. The commandment is spoken to all, and therefore it is necessary for all, for God never speaks in vain.

The moment we use a synonym for the word “kill,” we begin to see a little of the breadth of the commandment, “You shall not kill.” This expression is so common that we scarcely give it a thought; but we may say, “You shall not take life,” which is the same thing in other words, and we at once get a broader view. How much is contained in it will appear more as we proceed.

The Root of Murder

Of Christ it was prophesied that He should “magnify the law, and make it honorable.” *Isaiah* 42:21. In the fifth chapter

of Matthew we see the law as magnified by His teachings. He said:

Matthew 5 [RV]

²¹ You have heard that it was said, by them of old time, You shall not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment;

²² But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.

It will be noticed that the words, “without a cause,” are omitted in the *Revision*; the statement is absolute: every one who is angry with his brother is guilty of murder.

Jesus is not disparaging the teaching of old time; He Himself is the Beginning, and He came to make plain that which was taught from the beginning. He did not mean that the commandment, “You shall not kill,” was incomplete, and that He was giving something better and greater, but He showed the comprehensiveness of it,—that the words, “You shall not kill,” mean, “You shall not be angry.”

Romans 13

¹⁰ ...love is the fulfilling of the law,

and

1 Corinthians 13

⁵ ...love is not provoked.

God sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. In every case the sin is not the thing actually done, which man can see, so much as that condition in the man, that led to the doing of it. So long as the root from which murder grows is in the heart, the man is counted as a murderer.

Men naturally classify sins into different grades, and in the history of the apostate church, men have been required to do penance according to the recognized degree of guilt. Some sins were classed as venial, and others as mortal. For some

sins the payment of a small sum would provide satisfaction, while others could be expiated only by a vast amount of treasure or works. This is simply the religion of human nature.

Some sins are more unpopular than others; for some sins the sinner is ostracized, while others do not affect one's standing in society, but may even give one admission into what is considered the "best society."

But there is no evidence in the Scriptures that the Lord thus grades sin. We have no reason to suppose that He recognizes the distinction made by man, of "murder in the first degree," or "second degree."

1 John 3

⁴ ...sin is the transgression of the law,

and

Romans 6

²³ ...the wages of sin is death.

That comprehends the whole matter.

In this we are not belittling the guilt of murder, but showing where the sin lies. He who has taken the life of another has done an awful thing, yet he is not necessarily more guilty than one who has done something not so looked down upon by the world.

Let us consider the matter of anger: Who has not been angry? Indeed it is often thought that a display of anger is a mark of spirit, and of strength of character, and that he who cannot be provoked to anger is a milksop, and lacking in ambition.

But anger is really brief madness, and to give way to it, the same as to give way to any other passion, is a mark of weakness, and not of strength. How many murders have resulted from quarrels arising over some trifle. Two friends get into a dispute, they are both quick-tempered, and one takes offense

at something said by the other; retort is given, the men both lose control of them selves, and blows are exchanged. In their temporary madness a severe blow is struck, and one of them is killed.

Then comes the awakening; the man would never have done such a thing if he had known what he was doing, but he was so angry that he did not know what he was about. How many times has this been given as an excuse for something that one has done; and it is true, for a person in this condition is not master of himself.

In one sense the murder committed under such conditions is an accident; it certainly was not intentional. Yet the man is a murderer, nevertheless. The guilt lies not in the blow that was struck in a moment of unconsciousness, but in that disposition which made the blow possible.

How many there are who have been saved from the gallows only by accident. For let every person who has ever been so angry that he has, even for a moment, lost control of himself, remember this: that in that moment he might have taken a life, and the fact that he might have done so, and that it was only accident or the grace of God that preserved him from the actual deed, shows that he was really guilty of the possible murder. This terrible thought should be taken to heart, and serve as an effectual warning against giving way to passion.

Take the case of the first murder ever committed. We have the secret of it given in:

1 John 3

¹¹ This is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

¹² Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

You know the story. Cain and Abel each brought an offering to the Lord: Abel was accepted, Cain was rejected. What

evil quality is it that is aroused when one finds another preferred before him? It is jealousy. Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of him. Every jealous feeling is the seed of a murder.

Nay, more than this; as with anger, so with jealousy, it not simply leads to murder, but it is murder. Every one who feels hurt because somebody else is honored and he is passed by; every one who feels sour or morose because he has not been treated with the consideration that he thinks is his due, has violated the commandment which says, "You shall not kill."

This plainly appears from the text last quoted, taken in connection with the discussion of love.

Romans 13

¹⁰ Love works no ill to his neighbor...

1 Corinthians 13

⁵ ...love seeks not its own.

Love prefers another in honor; but where love is not, there is murder. Read again the verses quoted from *1 John*: the commandment is that we love one another, not as Cain, who slew his brother. Here we are told, not what love is, but what it is not. Love is the opposite of the spirit that Cain manifested. Whoever does not obey the law of love, is classed with Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.

This is further shown in the case of Joseph and his brethren: Joseph had received special marks of favor from his father, and because of his high character had been taken more fully into his confidence than his brethren. When they saw him coming to them on an errand of kindness, they said:

Genesis 37

¹⁹ ...Behold, this dreamer comes.

²⁰ Come now therefore, and let us slay him.

They did not actually take his life, but were turned aside from it by Reuben, only as a pater of expediency. In effect,

they killed him. They sold him into Egypt, only because they thought that thus they would get rid of him as effectually as by shedding his blood. This was the natural working of envy, for we read:

Acts 7

⁹ The patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt.

Envy, therefore, which to the sister of jealousy, is also murder. Every one who envies another, because of his goodness or any good fortune, has transgressed the commandment, "You shall not kill."

"Whence Come Wars?"

Let us take another development of the violation of this commandment. The Scripture asks:

James 4

¹ From whence come wars and fightings among you?

And the answer is returned:

¹ ...even of your lusts that war in your members.

Then the Word continues,

² You lust, and have not; you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; you fight and war, yet you have not.

Nothing is more common than war and the war spirit. War is not generally looked upon with abhorrence, even by most professed Christians, but in many cases as a thing to be gloried in.

In every war, from every paper and from almost every pulpit the word that is foremost whenever there is any provocation on the part of any other nation, is war. If war is not advocated or longed for, its possibility is at least considered, and yet the people who thus talk and think would be shocked at the imputation that they are breaking the sixth commandment.

But of what does war consist? Of fighting and killing; and killing is forbidden by the sixth commandment. There certainly can be no war with nobody killed, and no intent to kill.

Romans 13

¹⁰ Love works no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

The Saviour says,

Matthew 5

⁴⁴ Love your enemies...

...and love cannot possibly be consistent with killing them.

War comes from the lusts that war in the members of men. A war in which thousands are killed comes from precisely the same source as the murder of a single individual, and is simply the one case multiplied. One man is envious of another's good fortune, is jealous because the other has attained distinction that he has not, he desires some property that one has; he is angry with him because of disrespectful or contemptuous language, and so he kills him.

Even so it is with nations: they go to war because one has used undiplomatic language, and will not withdraw it. One is getting the advantage of another in the matter of commerce; one is acquiring territory which the other wants or claims as its own by right. So they go to war, thousands are killed, and the world and the church unite to praise the glorious deeds that have been done. Meanwhile, the man who killed a single person, has been hanged.

All the time the commandment says, "You shall not kill," and no amount of casuistry or reasoning can reconcile war with this commandment since if it is wrong to kill a single man, manifestly it cannot be right to kill a thousand.

What Self-Defense Involves

Some will say:

“But we are never the aggressors; we do not fight except in self-defense, to maintain our rights, and we do not believe in fighting under any other conditions.”

It seems to be almost universally accepted that people must defend themselves and their rights, although we have the assurance that:

Psalm 140

¹² The Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

And He says,

Romans 12

¹⁹ Vengeance is mine, I will repay.

So whoever thinks that he must defend himself, or avenge his own wrongs, takes upon himself the work that belongs to God alone, and shows that he thinks that he is better able to manage his own case than the Lord is.

Let us see what is written in the law. Jesus said:

Matthew 5

³⁸ You have heard that it has been said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth;

³⁹ But I say unto you that you resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Whoever looks up this quotation will find that it is not addressed to individuals, but was a rule for the direction of the judges in the cases that came before them. The whole law of which it was a part was given to the Israelites only because of their unbelief, and because they rejected God from being their sole King and Judge.

In this, as in many other things, we must believe that “from the beginning it was not so,” and Christ’s work is always to bring men back to the beginning, to Himself. The words of Christ, “I say unto you that you resist not evil,” taken in this

connection, show that His followers are not to have recourse even to the course of law. This is especially what Christ has reference to, as the next verse shows:

Matthew 5

⁴⁰ If any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also.

How much less, then, should one take the initiative, and sue another at the law. And since even “legal” measures in self-defense are forbidden by the Gospel, which is the revelation of the commandment, how plain it is that one has no right to take things into his own hands, to do anything in self-defense.

It is very common to hear this teaching called impractical, but the burden of defending the Lord is not laid upon us. He knew what He was saying and He meant what He said, and His own life furnished the example of His teachings.

When an armed band came out to take Him by violence, and Peter zealously undertook to defend Him, and He rebuked him, saying,

” They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

If there was ever a case of rights invaded, a case of self-defense against injustice, oppression, and violence could be justifiable, that was the one. But He demonstrated His own teachings, leaving us an example.

1 Peter 2

²³ When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.

Someone is sure to be ready with the question,

“What would you do in case a robber should assault you, demanding your money or your life?”

We need never borrow trouble from the future, or speculate

how the precepts of Christ can be obeyed, under various conditions. If we believe, grace will be given for the time of need.

In the supposed case, it seems quite evident that the course of wisdom would be to give up the money and save the life. But suppose one resists in such a case, let us make a comparison between him and the robber. If one objects to parting with his money, the robber may kill him and take it. In that case the robber would be rightly called a murderer. It is a sordid murder; he has taken his victim's life for a paltry sum of money.

But suppose the robber does not succeed in the object; suppose his intended victim is a quicker or stronger man of the two, and kills him instead; is he not also a murderer? He has killed a man merely for a sum of money. The robber would kill him to get it, he kills the robber to save it. In either case it would be a life taken for money. Who can say that one is less guilty than the other? Self-defense does not seem so attractive when put in this form, does it?

But the objector may say that it is not for money that the man kills the robber, but to save his own life. Very well, let it be so. Then the man takes upon himself the responsibility of deciding who ought to die and who ought to live. He acts on the assumption that his own life is worth more than the robber's, and takes the case into his own hands, acting both as judge and executioner. This is something for us to think about.

The commandment does not say, You shall not kill except in self-defense, or under provocation; You shall not kill anyone except a thief, or a very bad man, or one who you think is not as fit to live as you are. There is no exception: "You shall not kill."

The whole question of self-defense, or of standing for one's rights, is settled by the statement that "Love seeks not her own." The defending of one's rights shows the absence of love; where love is not, there is hatred, and hatred is murder, so we

cannot avoid the conclusion that self-defense is murder.

The commandment, “You shall not kill,” forbids violence of any form or degree. No matter how many objections may arise, the fact is that the commandment is easy to keep when the love of God is in the heart, for

1 John 5

³ This is the love of God that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.

It is difficult and impossible to keep the law, only when the law of God is not given a place in the heart. There is no depth of cruelty of which human nature is not capable when it is not influenced by the law of God; and there is no measure of righteousness that is not possible where that love is given full sway.

A Deadly Weapon

There are various kinds of weapons with which murder is committed. One may use a knife, or poison, and among poisons there are some that are worse than others. The tongue is declared to be:

James 3

⁸ ...an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Of the natural, unregenerate man it is said,

Romans 3

¹³ ...the poison of asps is under their lips.

Who shall say that it is less sinful to poison a man with the tongue than to poison him with arsenic? The Lord says:

Leviticus 19

¹⁶ You shall not go up and down as a tale-bearer among your people, neither shall you stand against the blood of your brother.

A man’s whole life may be poisoned by a few ill-advised words. It is not merely the one talked about who is injured,

but the one to whom the evil tale is repeated may be destroyed eternally, through its influence. And the evil is not lessened, but it is even aggravated, by the fact that the evil thing that is reported is true. We need, then, most earnestly to pray:

Psalm 141

³ Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

The Commandment Positive

The law says further:

Leviticus 19

¹⁷ You shall not hate your brother in thine heart; you shall in anywise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.

Hatred is murder; the absence of love is hatred; and we here see that whoever knowingly allows his neighbor to remain in sin without seeking to save him does not love him. It is counted as hatred, and he is therefore his murderer.

1 John 3

¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The brethren here referred to are not merely those in immediate fellowship with one, but all mankind; for Christ, who gave His life to save the world, said:

Psalm 22 [see also *Hebrews 2:12*]

²² I will declare My name unto My brethren;

He meant also those who were hateful, and hating God and one another. And He came as the living embodiment of the law, and His mission was to save life. In this we see that the law is not negative, but positive; it does not require merely that we should refrain from taking life; and demands that we should do everything possible to save life.

1 John 3

¹⁵ No murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

This teaches that it is only by the recognition of eternal life, that we keep from the violation of the commandment. That life abiding in us makes us know the sacredness of life, so that when we see our brother going in the way that leads to death, we are constrained to give ourselves to save him.

The Sacredness of Life

The sacredness of the commandment is seen when we realize that life is the gift of God,—not the gift of something apart from Him, but the gift of Himself. Life is as sacred as God, because He is our life. Therefore he who would destroy life would if it were possible destroy God. This is but another statement of the Scripture truth that:

1 John 3

⁸ He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning.

John 8

⁴⁴ ...He was a murderer from the beginning...

He set himself in opposition to God, and although he did not, since he could not, slay the Lord, he was nevertheless a murderer from the beginning, for he had murder in his heart; and the fact was demonstrated when he instigated the princes of this world to kill the Prince of life.

Life is not ours to give or take. The command, “You shall not kill,” is absolute, and we may not take our own life any more than our neighbor’s life. The reason why, is that it is a sacred trust from God. When one kills another, he deprives him of life for a season. He may shorten his life by years, or it may be that he deprives his victim of but a few moments of life. But even though the one killed had but five minutes more to live, the act is just as much murder as though he had five years.

This truth applies to one's dealing with himself, as well as with another. He who by base practices or neglect or abuse of God's gifts shortens his own life, is directly violating the commandment, "You shall not kill."

What a sacred responsibility rests upon every one to lay hold on eternal life by faith, by making use of every agency which God has given for the sustenance of life, and by denying every sinful lust that wars against the soul,—the life. To keep one's body and health is as sacred a duty as to preserve the soul from sin.

The man who injures the body of another is justly considered a criminal. But his own body is just as sacred as that of the other's, and is really no more his own.

1 Corinthians 6

¹⁹ What? know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?

1 Corinthians 3

¹⁷ If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.

Therefore to injure one's own body or willfully to neglect any means which tends to build it up, is to defile the temple of God, and therefore is a sin against God.

Partners with God

We are workers together with God; God takes us into partnership with Himself in His life work. Everybody is a portion of the channel of the river of life; the stream coming from the heart of God flows through every one who does not obstruct it.

Christ, who gives the living water, says that the living water shall flow from every one who believes. *John 7:38*. In giving man the power to perpetuate the race, God makes him a partner with Himself in dispensing life. Whoever abuses this

gift, or by any means cuts off possible or prospect of life, or by any means renders himself incapable of giving the fullest possible life to his offspring, is directly guilty of violating the commandment, "You shall not kill." Life is a wonderfully sacred thing, and it is a fearful sin to trifle with it.

If we saw nothing but this side of the question, we might well exclaim, "Who then can be saved?" We have all "sinned and come short of the glory of God." *Romans* 3:23. But there is hope.

Psalm 130

³ If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.

And here we are comforted with the knowledge that all the commandments of God are promises, and the greater the commandment, the more exceeding great and precious the promise which it contains,—the promise by which we are made partakers of the divine nature "and having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." *2 Peter* 1:4. Precious promise!

"You shall not kill." No longer is it a hard enactment, purely negative in its force, but it is the blessed assurance that God in His infinite mercy, and by His wondrous grace will let the stream of life flow through us so freely that it will restore that which was lost, and keep us from every way of death.

It is the assurance of redemption from every evil habit, of salvation from every vice that tends to the destruction of soul and body. Not only so, but that we shall be dispensers of that stream which causes everything to live withersoever it comes.

Let us then fight the good fight the faith, and lay hold on eternal life.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

We come now to the seventh commandment. Before entering into a more minute consideration of it, it will be worth while to consider its place among the ten.

The Order of the Commandments

Did it ever occur to the reader that the order of the commandments is not accidental? It certainly cannot be, and there must surely be a lesson for us in their arrangement. We may not know all that there is in it, but it will certainly repay study.

The first reveals God in His essential attribute as the Saviour:

Exodus 20

² I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.

He is the only God, because He is the only One who can save.

Isaiah 43

¹¹ I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour.

The second naturally grows out of this, for:

Isaiah 45

²⁰ They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their idols, and pray unto a god that cannot save.

Then we have, in the third, the assurance and the power of God's name. We are not to bow down to graven images, which are nothing, but to take His name, and we have the assurance that we shall not take that for nothing, or "in vain." It

supplies all that He Himself is.

The fourth commandment reveals the name,

Psalm 75

¹ ...for that His name is near, His wondrous works declare.

It shows the Lord at work and at rest; and when we see His works understandingly, we learn His ways, and enter into His rest.

From the contemplation of God as Creator, we are next brought to consider Him as Father. He is the Universal Father, and human parenthood is the revelation of God working through the flesh. From the honor due to our parents, we are to learn the reverence due to God, the Supreme Father of all.

As the life transmitted from father to son is God's life, the sixth commandment is designed to guard its sacredness.

Then we come to the seventh commandment, which also emphasizes the sacredness of life in showing that it must be kept pure and unadulterated. God's life is simplicity itself. His is seen in the most common things by which He conveys life to us, as the air and water. The Apostle Paul says:

2 Corinthians 11

³ I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

The sin of Eve was the first case of adultery, and all the specific acts of adultery since that time have been but outgrowths from that. She left the simple for the complex; the straight way of righteousness and life, for the maze of sin and death.

The Beginning of Evil

It is not necessary for us to dwell upon the grosser forms of the violation of this commandment; they are generally regarded not only as sin, but as crimes, as offenses against respectability.

Whether the gross violation of this commandment is worse than the violation of the other commandments God alone knows; but one thing is sure, and that is that the “commandment is exceeding broad.” People generally regard it as prohibiting the culmination of sin, whereas it deals specially with the beginning of it. Christ’s words in the Sermon on the Mount, show the spirituality of the commandment:

Matthew 5

²⁷ You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery;

²⁸ But I say unto you, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery already with her in his heart.

Christ was not adding anything to the commandment which He Himself had given; He was revealing the breadth and depth of it. His language is unqualified and unlimited. The commandment is violated by an impure thought or look, not simply upon a woman who is not one’s wife, but upon any women whatsoever. The lustful thought is adultery.

From the commandment as magnified by Christ’s statement of it, we see that adultery may exist even within the marriage relation, for that relation does not sanctify lustful thought and impure action.

The Institution of Marriage

God Himself instituted marriage in the beginning. When God made man, He made them male and female, and gave them dominion, saying,

Genesis 1

²⁸ Be fruitful and multiply and subdue and fill the earth.

This was even before the Sabbath was given. On the sixth day, God created man, the last of all His works. The animals were all brought before him for him to name, but among them he found no help that was meet (suitable) for him. There was

none that could be a companion for him. So God took from his side a rib, which He built into a woman, and brought to him, and, recognizing his counterpart, Adam said,

Genesis 2

²³ This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

It was after the union of the man and the woman had been blessed by God, and the command to be fruitful had been given, that

Genesis 1

³¹ God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Then came the Sabbath, the seventh day, which God blessed for man's good. These two institutions, marriage and the Sabbath, come from Eden, and belong to Eden. In marriage, even as in the Sabbath, we have that which, rightly understood, brings us closer to God in His working than anything else.

True marriage brings men into close connection with the Lord, making them partners with Him in His work. In it we have the revelation of the mystery of Christ in His union with the church. The Apostle Paul, after quoting the words found in the second chapter of *Genesis*, "They shall be one flesh," adds,

Ephesians 5

³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

And he says that husbands should love their wives, as Christ also loved the church, and that the husband should nourish and cherish the wife even as the Lord the church.

Ephesians 5

³⁰ For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

Marriage is designed to teach us of Christ's saving union with us; but the institution has been so perverted, that as a general thing it is not a true revelation of Christ. We must learn first from Christ what marriage ought to be, and then it in turn will reveal to us more of the Lord than we could know without it.

The Forbearance of Love

There is a world of instruction for us in the statement that "even Christ pleased not Himself." *Romans* 15:3. He loved the church, and gave Himself for it. Yet He does not force Himself upon any; He has an infinite and continuous longing for the response to His love, yet He is patient and forbearing. He stands at the door, and knocks, letting us know that He loves us with an everlasting love, but He will do nothing without our consent. He will not press His attentions upon us.

His long-suffering, forbearing love, always pleading, and yet waiting, is the most marvelous in the universe. Whoever knows the love of Christ for him, will know the tender considerateness that ought to be shown to a wife.

"Arranging a Marriage"

In order to understand the truth about anything, we must go to the beginning of it. When the disciples asked Jesus a question concerning marriage and divorce, referring to certain regulations that had been given by Moses, Jesus said that these were because of the hardness of their hearts, "but from the beginning it was not so"; and then He quoted the record in *Genesis*.

Matthew 19

⁴ And he answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male

and female,

⁵ And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

⁶ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

We often read in the papers that “a marriage has been arranged” between certain parties. Now if we would know exactly how a marriage ought to be arranged, we must go to the record of those which God has planned and controlled. When God would provide a companion for Adam, He made a woman, and “brought her unto the man.” There was no mistake here; the pair were made for each other, and both recognized the fact, and were satisfied.

Another striking example is found in the case of the marriage of Isaac. He was the child of promise, the heir of the promise made to Abraham, and his life was in harmony with this fact. He was forty years old, yet even at that age he did not choose a wife for himself.

Even professed Christians have not been ashamed to indulge in cheap wit at the expense of Isaac, saying they should not like to have their parents choose for them; but it must be remembered that Abraham did not choose a wife for Isaac. God Himself did the choosing.

Read the beautiful story in the twenty-fourth chapter of *Genesis*. Abraham’s tried servant, who had the same faith as his master, was sent in search of the one whom God had chosen for Isaac. When the servant said,

Genesis 24

³⁹ Peradventure the woman will not follow me...

Abraham replied,

⁴⁰ The Lord before whom I walk will send His angel with you, and prosper your way.

And so it was. And after traveling a long distance, the servant halted at a well, and prayed to the Lord to show him which of the damsels that came to draw water was the one for his master's son. He did not pray aloud, but spoke in his heart, and even before he had finished praying, the sign which he had asked was granted.

The whole matter was arranged by the Lord, and the relatives of Rebecca, as well as Rebecca herself, recognized the fact. They said,

Genesis 24

⁵⁰ The thing proceeds from the Lord; we cannot speak unto you bad or good.

⁵¹ Behold, Rebecca is before you, take her and go, and let her be the master's son's wife, as the Lord has spoken.

And Rebecca, when asked if she would go at once, said, "I will go." Then the return journey was made, and the servant told Isaac all things that he had done, and Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca,

⁶⁷ ...and she became his wife, and he loved her.

Galatians 4

²⁸ Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Yes; also as Adam was, we are new creatures. Therefore in those two instances we have a picture of true Christian marriage, of such marriage as will be an effective safeguard against the violation of the seventh commandment.

Who Shall Choose?

But someone will say,

"How unsatisfactory, to have no courtship, no love-making, beforehand."

Well, satisfaction all one's life after marriage is far better than a little brief satisfaction beforehand. "Courtship" and "love-making" are terms that should not be used among

Christians. Love cannot be made, for it is of God, and has existed from eternity. We can only allow Him to shed it abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. *Romans 5:5.*

Whoever attempts to make love can produce at the best only a counterfeit. And where God is allowed to direct and indicate His choice, there is no necessity for courtship. We hear much about heresy, which means, choosing for one's self. God is the only One who has the wisdom and the right to choose. He who chooses for himself, whether in the matter of marriage or anything else, is a real heretic. Such a course shows distrust of God; it is in reality a violation of the first commandment.

When the Scriptures say that the woman was created for the man, we are not to understand merely that women in general were created for men, but that as in the case of Adam and Eve, God who knows the end from the beginning, and who writes our members in His book even before they are formed, and who has a definite purpose for each individual that is born, provides for each man a help meet for him, and will as certainly bring the two together if they will have the patience to wait, as He brought Eve to Adam, and Rebecca to Isaac. And if they are both in Him, they will recognize His choice, and find their happiness in it.

When all the animals; were brought before Adam, for him to name them, he could not find among them a help fit for him, but when God brought Eve to him he recognized her as his complement (complement).

Suppose now that out of the thousands of women that a man may see, he chooses for himself one that was not made for him, who cannot fill out that which is lacking in his life, and who is not a help fitted for him. Is it not plain that the mistake which he makes is of the same kind, though less in degree, that Adam would have made if he had chosen one of the creatures that first passed before him, instead of waiting

for the one whom God made for him? This is the reason why there is as much of the animal, and so little of the spiritual in many marriages.

I would that I could speak confidentially and personally to every young person whose life is all before him, and who has it in his power to accept happiness at the hands of God, or to make shipwreck of it. There are infinite possibilities before every one, when God is allowed to order the life.

Contrast, for example, the uncertainties, the doubt, the uneasiness, the misunderstandings, heart-burnings and jealousies, the fear that one may be mistaken, the wonder if the other is sincere and constant, with the calm inexpressible joy, and quiet restful peace that comes when God's choice is recognized. The two will know that God has brought them together as surely as they know that He is their Creator.

It is a common saying that the course of true love never runs smooth; but when two persons love in the Lord, their trust in each other is the same as their trust in God, and the certainty of their mutual love is the same as their certainty of sins forgiven.

The Hidden Working of God

From the microscopic world we may learn a wonderful lesson. The careful and patient observer sees under his glass hundreds of simple cells, either of plants or animals, all in constant motion. There is as much definiteness in their movements as there is in those of the thousands of men that we see passing and repassing in the streets.

Watch one of them, and you may see it in its coarse approach very closely to another one, but instead of touching they separate instantly, as when two similar magnetic poles are brought together. But watch it further, and you will see it come close to another, and these two by common impulse will join and become one.

Is this accidental? If it were, why did not the first two join when they were so close together that they had to change their course in order to keep apart? No; these simple cells have no mind of their own, but God's mind directs them. In them we see God at work in His secret place; and can it be that He who guides in the union of the lowest forms of life, in bodies so small that their universe is a drop of water, will not as certainly direct in the higher creation, in beings whom He has made to rule the worlds?

If in this complex being the will of the Lord is as fully done as in the simple atom, then the work will be perfect, never to be undone, for:

Ecclesiastes 3

¹⁴ Whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it; and God does it that men should fear before Him.

Working Contrary to God's Plan

Christ, referring to the beginning when God brought Eve to Adam, said,

Matthew 19

⁶ What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

Man's attempt to put asunder that which God has joined is, according to Christ's words, the committing of adultery.

Suppose then, having in view the exceeding breadth of the law, we carry this matter back to the beginning. If a man does not wait God's time to bring to him the woman whom He has designed as his counterpart, we have, if not the putting asunder of what God has joined together, the keeping asunder of that which God has designed to join, as well as the joining of that which God did not purpose should be joined. What else can this be but adultery? And this is one of the commonest causes of that which man recognizes as adultery.

God's commandments are not directed merely against the

culmination, the final act of sin, but against its inception, against everything that could possibly lead to the end. “His commandment is life everlasting” (*John* 12:50), and cannot possibly have any connection whatever with death, or with anything that can end in death.

Faithfulness to God the Safeguard Against Adultery

Although we are God’s offspring, He says, “I am married to you.” *Jeremiah* 3:14. Eve was Adam’s offspring, yet she was married to him. So we are to recognize ourselves as united to God, channels for the stream of life from God, and are to give diligence, to preserve that stream uncontaminated.

The committing of adultery, the perversion of that life, is primarily a sin against God, so much so that any injury to any person is eclipsed by it. David, referring to his sin, not only in taking the wife of Uriah, but in causing him to be killed, said,

Psalm 51

⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in
Your sight.

Joseph, when tempted by Potiphar’s wife, reminded her of how much confidence his master reposed in him, having given him absolute control of his household; and then, instead of saying, as one might expect, that he could not commit such a crime against his master, he said,

Genesis 39

⁹ How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against
God?

We have therefore only to keep God before our eyes continually, and to be loyal to Him, allowing His life to flow through us, and there will be no danger of our doing any injury to any person on earth.

The Flesh Against the Spirit

It is true in the fullest sense that we are God’s offspring, for

there can be no life except from Him.

Acts 17

²⁸ In Him we live, and move, and have our being.

It is evident, therefore, that God ought by right to have the prime control in the bringing of every new creature into existence. Otherwise there is a violation of the commandment. This is plain from the following Scripture:

James 4

⁴ You adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?

1 John 2

¹⁵ If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Love of the world, union with the world, is therefore the very essence of adultery, and as such is forbidden by the commandment. Now we read that “the lust of the flesh” is of the world. Therefore it follows that whatever is the result of carnal desire, and not the working of God’s Spirit, is adultery.

Instruments of God

Someone doubtless will say:

“How can it be otherwise, so long as we are in the flesh?”

Very easily, if God is allowed to have His own way. He has given Christ power over all flesh, and

Romans 8

⁹ You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.

We are to recognize our bodies as the dwelling-place of God, and all our members instruments of His righteousness. He is to be allowed to work in us both to will and to do. *Philippians* 2:13. The unrighteous man is to forsake his thoughts, but only that God may think His thoughts in him, and he is to forsake his ways, that God may reveal His ways

in him. *Isaiah* 55:7-9.

2 Corinthians 10

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

It is not simply on the Sabbath day, but all the time, that we are not to do our own ways, nor find our own pleasure. Even now, in individuals, God's kingdom is to come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in order that at last it may be so all over the earth. *Matthew* 6:10.

Now it is evident that a child born of parents living thus fully joined to the Lord, would be born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. That this is possible is seen in the birth of John the Baptist; his parents were...

Luke 1

⁶ ...both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the law blameless.

And he was...

¹⁵ ...filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

Read also:

Galatians 4

²² It is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.

²³ But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but he of the freewoman was by promise.

And again,

²⁹ He that was born of the flesh persecuted him that was born of the Spirit.

Here we see a direct contrast: one child born of the flesh, another born of the Spirit; and since all who are Christ's are Abraham's seed, and in Isaac is his seed called, it is plain that just such a birth as Isaac had is the right of every child, and is to be expected of every Christian parent.

We might mention the case of Jeremiah, who was ordained a prophet of God before he was born, and others as well, to show that the cases cited are not more unique specimens.

The Power of the New Birth

If any say, “This is too high; we cannot attain to it,” or, recognizing its possibility, mourn over their grievous failures, let them be comforted with the knowledge that God is able to make all grace abound, and that He does not remember the sins of our youth, but puts them away from us as far as the east is from the west. *Psalm 25:7; Psalm 103:12.*

It is possible for a man to be born again, even when he is old, so that all may be heirs of God, and of Him only. By the new birth we are delivered from all the evil inherited in the first birth, and this is the comfort that parents may have, not simply for themselves, when they think of their sinful heritage, but for the children who through their ignorance or self-will, may have been born after the flesh.

The commandments of God are not mere negative precepts, but positive assurances:

“You shall not commit adultery.”

This is a promise that the stream of God’s life, if we but yield to it, will flow through us undefiled, making us in all our ways perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. This is the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. Given free course through us, it cleanses us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, itself remaining undefiled.

For by the power of the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ, His life will, if we believe, work mightily in us to swallow up death in victory. We may then rejoice in this commandment more than in all riches, and, submitting to the everlasting life, may begin a new life, fresh and clean, and find even in this sin-cursed earth, an Eden of joy.

The Hope of Eternity

A man makes his own surroundings, so to him who is a new creature,

2 Corinthians 5

¹⁷ ...old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.

Now God says:

Isaiah 66

²² As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, so shall your seed and your name remain.

So God expects and provides that every child of truly Christian parents shall also be Christian, and shall live for ever. It is the same as with those whose union has been brought about by Him.

Isaiah 65

²³ They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble, for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

There are very few people who need to be told that it is wrong to break into a shop and rob a cash-box; that burglary, house-breaking, pocket-picking, and so forth, are criminal and sinful acts. These are all recognized as vulgar crimes, and because of this many suppose the commandments that forbid such things are out of date, so far as Christians are concerned, and that Christianity has outgrown them. Many people have said:

What do we need of the commandment, "You shall not steal"? Everybody knows that stealing is wrong. Even a savage shows, by his attempt to conceal a theft, that he knows that it is not the right thing.

But we must again repeat that the commandment is exceeding broad, surpassing man's highest thought of perfection. While all, with the possible exception of some who from infancy have been trained to theft, know that the grosser acts, of which the civil law takes notice, are sinful, there are very many professed Christians who in their daily business violate the eighth commandment without the slightest compunction.

The Practice of the Majority

It is not an uncommon thing for people to charge different prices for the same goods; to expose one class of goods for inspection, and to deliver an inferior quality; to take advantage of a customer's ignorance; or in various other ways to get more than the annual worth of a thing sold.

Everything of this kind is just as really stealing as to pick one's pocket of his purse; yet it is continually condoned on the ground that it is "business." The fact that "everybody does

it” seems to many business men, even though they be professed Christians, to be sufficient justification for any act. They seem to have the idea that if the majority of people are united in any practice, the Lord will regard it as right, even though it is wrong in itself.

Indeed, not only with respect to this commandment, but with all the others, the general custom of the people is of paramount weight with very many. Call attention to a wrong practice, and the reply will be, “Everybody does it;” or present some requirement of the Divine law, and they will say, “Nobody does that nowadays,” thinking that they have thereby settled the matter. But the Lord says,

Exodus 23

² You shall not follow a multitude to do evil.

And,

Proverbs 2

²¹ Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.

Much of the “business” that is done in this world is the devil’s business, and will not stand the test of heaven:

Matthew 7

¹² Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

“Business Methods” - “Making a Living”

The false idea that it is the business of every man to “make a living,” leads to many thefts, both small and great. Competition is very keen, and there are many engaged in business, who have no conscience of right or wrong, who fear not God, neither regard man. The unscrupulous customs which they have introduced into various lines of business, have led many Christian people little by little to lower their own standard. The desire to compete with their rivals, and to keep business,

has blunted their fine perception of right and wrong, until things that would once have shocked them, now seem to be right and necessary.

By the term “business methods,” men commonly understand something different from the somewhat old-fashioned principles laid down in the Bible. Business and religion are thought to be two separate things; and inasmuch as men are exhorted to be “diligent in business,” men persuade themselves that whatever is “business” is correct. They forget that at the same time that they are “diligent in business” (*Proverbs* 22:29) they are to be “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” *Romans* 12:11.

The sole business of all men is to serve the Lord:

Ecclesiastes 12

¹³ Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man;

¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

God makes it His business to give us a living, and He alone can do it. It is a grave error to suppose that a living can be made out of methods which have death in them. Every sin, every deviation from the law of God, has death in it, and can end only in death. Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life.” *John* 14:6. Therefore only the way of truth,—Christ’s own way,—can give life, or in other words, give one “a living.”

Non-Payment of Debts

If one puts his hand into another’s pocket or cash-box and takes money, that is universally recognized as stealing. It must be evident that there is no less sin if one finds money belonging to another, and appropriates it.

Likewise if one is entrusted with money to deliver to another, and he fails to do it, but uses it himself, this is also stealing, equally with the other, although it is sometimes des-

ignated by a milder term.

What is the difference, then, if one has received from another goods or service, for which he owes a certain amount of money, and he fails to pay the debt? No matter now men may regard it, or what the law of the land may say about it, the fact remains that it is a direct violation of the eighth commandment.

The Saviour's quotation of this commandment was, "De-fraud not" (*Mark 10:19*),—deprive no one of that which is his due; so the convenient way some people have of forgetting to pay their debts is a transgression of this commandment. The Bible way is to pay a thing just as soon as it is due.

Some one will say:

"One cannot always have by him the means wherewith to pay a debt."

Very true, and this emphasizes the necessity for the apostolic injunction,

Romans 13

⁸Owe no man anything...

If people realized that failure to pay a just debt is a violation of God's law, and if they had a proper sense of the sacredness of the law, they would not order things for which they cannot pay. You again might say,

"I go in debt only for the actual necessities of life; if I have no food in the house, and no money, I cannot see my children crying for bread, when the baker will trust me."

That is exactly the argument that some people use for taking money without leave. In either case it is lack of trust in God. Anyone who, because he is in need, incurs a debt which he has no prospect of paying, cannot condemn the act of stealing under pressure of need.

If people would, in fear of the commandment which says, “You shall not steal,” refuse to incur a debt, no matter what the need, they would enjoy some wonderful experiences of what God could do in supplying their need. He knows what His children need, and He says,

Matthew 6

³³ Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

But when men reverse the order, seeking first to provide for themselves, they shut God off from bestowing upon them the riches of the kingdom. It is impossible to lay too much stress on this feature of the violation of the commandment.

If one has money laid aside for some specific purpose, it is very tempting and very easy to use it for something else. Of course this would be all right if it were simply that one were purposing to purchase a certain thing, and should use that money for something else instead; but it is far from being right, when the money thus laid aside is due to another.

Thus: When one’s rent is due quarterly, the only way that people with small incomes can be prepared to pay it, is by laying aside each week the weekly proportion. Even though the rent technically be not due until the close of the quarter, it is really due each week, and if the money be used for food or clothing, or worse yet, for pleasure, so that the sum is not ready by quarter day, there is a direct transgression of the commandment. One has appropriated that which is not his own. The money laid aside week by week belongs to the landlord, as much as though it were already in his pocket. The fact that we are allowed to keep it in our possession for a time, does not give us any more right to use it than we would have to use an equal amount that some other tenant had entrusted to us to pay to the landlord on his account.

What We Owe to the World

To all of us the Scripture says,

1 Corinthians 6

¹⁹ ...you are not your own.

The whole law of which the eighth commandment is a part, is summed up in these words:

Luke 10

²⁷ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

Love means service. The fact that we are not our own, but belong to the Lord, who not only has made us, but who has redeemed us, shows that our service belongs to Him. The Apostle Paul recognized this when he said,

Acts 27

²³ There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.

So the law requires that we shall serve the Lord with all our soul and strength and mind.

But we cannot do anything directly for the Lord. He is not in need of food or clothing, and we could not supply Him if He were. But He has shown us how to render service to Him. His life is given to the world; therefore He says that every service rendered to man is done to Him. We are exhorted,

Ecclesiastes 9

¹⁰ Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

To perform our daily labor with all the strength of body and mind that we have is, if done in the fear of God, to love and serve the Lord with all our strength. So the Apostle's exhortation is,

Colossians 3

²² Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service as man-pleasers, but in singleness

of heart, fearing God;

²³ And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ.

Strength is more than money; therefore if one serves with less than his full strength, or is content to do poor work, on any pretext whatever, he is just as surely guilty of fraud as though he kept back money that belonged to another. The commandment, "You shall not steal," requires us always to give our best strength, and to do our best work. It is a sin and disgrace for a professed Christian to do poor work.

This does not mean that anybody can at once be master of his business, but it does mean that one should always do his best, and always be striving to improve himself, and that he should not assume to be able to do what he is not. If a man be a carpenter, for instance, and someone entrusts work to him expecting him to be a skilled laborer, and he spoils the job, putting his employer to additional expense because of his incapacity, it is fraud.

People often excuse themselves for slack work, on the ground that they are receiving very small pay; but this is no excuse whatever. Our duty is to do with our might, in the best possible way, whatever we have to do, regardless of the wages received. We owe ourselves to God, and through Him to the world. If we hold back any part of ourselves, we are guilty of robbery. The debt has already been incurred, and we are to work in recognition of it. The wages we receive are not to be considered an equivalent for our labor, but as a gift from God.

Labor is life, and money is no equivalent for life. He who works only for what he gets, and who says that he is rendering sufficient service for the small wages he receives, has a very low estimate of the value of his life. If his work is really worth no more than the money he receives, he is robbing God of strength due Him, and so is robbing the world of service

that he ought to render; for, contrary to the common idea, “the world owes me a living,” we owe to the world the living which God has already given us in advance.

Robbing God

There is another feature of this question that few people think of. The commandment is continually broken by men who would no more think of taking money from another man than of cutting off their own right hand. You might leave any amount of money with them, uncounted, and they would return it all; yet they are guilty of robbery.

God asks this plain question:

Malachi 3

⁸ Will a man rob God?...

The people of whom He asks it think that they are innocent, for they reply,

⁸ ...Wherein have we robbed You?...

And the Lord says,

⁸ ...In tithes and offerings.

And then He continues,

⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

¹⁰ Bring you all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in My house, and prove Me now herewith, with the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

¹¹ And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, says the Lord of hosts.

¹² And all nations shall call you blessed; for you shall be a delightsome land, says the Lord of hosts.

This reproof and promise have special application at this

time, for the message has reference to the speedy coming of the day of the Lord. It is not local in its application, but reaches to the end of time. It is addressed specially to those who think they are serving the Lord, but who in a most important particular are not. If it is a grievous sin to steal from man, what can be said of robbing God?

One can rob another only by appropriating something that belongs to that other. So the fact that God charges us with robbing Him with respect to the tithe proves that the tithe belongs to Him. This is plainly stated in the Scripture.

Leviticus 27

³⁰ All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord.

It may be said that this is only under the Levitical law. But truth is truth for ever: that which is the Lord's once, remains His always. The tithe of all that we receive belongs to the Lord, and not to us, even though technically we have earned it, and it is paid to us in wages.

To one tenth of our income we have no more right than we have to our neighbor's money. God lets it come into our possession for a test as to whether or not we really regard the rights of property, and recognize Him as the owner of all things.

Christ's Teaching Concerning Tithe-Paying

“But did not the Lord reprove the Scribes and Pharisees for their scrupulous payment of tithes?”

No, He did not; hear His own words:

Matthew 23

²⁸ Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth; these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Instead of saying that they ought not to have paid tithe, Jesus says that they ought to have done it, but they ought not to have made their strictness in this matter an excuse for neglecting something else.

“You ought,” means, “You owe it.” The Saviour recognized the tithe as belonging to the Lord, by saying that we owe it to Him. He says also that we ought to be very strict in this matter; for the Scribes and Pharisees tithed herbs that were of trifling value, and He says they ought to have done it.

The Tithe Before the Days of Moses

The payment of the tithes was long before the days of Moses. When Jacob had his vision of God, as he was fleeing homeless and desolate from the wrath of his brother, he said,

Genesis 28

²² ...of all that You shall give me, I will surely give a tenth unto You.

And many years before this, Abraham returning with the recovered spoil, taken from the city of Sodom, was met by God’s priest, Melchizedek, to whom he gave the tenth of all. Abraham had sworn that he would not take so much as a shoelatchet of that which belonged to the king of Sodom, so he returned the goods which he had recovered to their proper owners,—the tenth to the Lord, and nine-tenths to the king, to use as he thought fit. *Genesis 14.*

All who are Christ’s are Abraham’s seed, and heirs with him of the promise. The oath of God to Abraham supports us in fleeing for refuge to the holy place where Christ is priest after the order of Melchizedek. Therefore the obligation to pay tithe is the same upon us so it was upon Abraham. And since the tithe belongs to the Lord, it should no more be considered a hardship to return it to Him, than it would be to pay to a neighbor some money that was given us in trust for him.

The Tithe and the Sabbath

The tithe rests on the same basis as the Sabbath; the same expression is used of both:

Exodus 20

¹⁰ The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.

It is God's holy day.

Leviticus 20

³⁰ ...the tithe...is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord.

Both serve the same purpose. The Sabbath is not a burden, but it teaches us God's power, in which we may rest. The payment of tithe is not a burden, because it does not belong to us; but God has arranged that it should come into our hands, in order that in returning it to Him we may be reminded that

1 Timothy 6

¹⁷ ...He gives us richly all things to enjoy.

The curse that follows the withholding of the tithe is not an arbitrary exhibition of God's wrath, but is the natural result of our shutting God out of our lives. The abundant blessing that is promised if all the tithes are brought in, inevitably follows the recognition of Him which keeps us ever in His presence.

Honor God with the First-Fruits

Many who do not deny the obligation to pay tithe, do not pay it, excusing themselves by saying,

“I have nothing with which to pay; after I have fed and clothed my family, I have nothing left.”

But whoever has wherewith to get food and clothing, has wherewith to pay the tithe; for the principle taught by the tithe is this: that nine-tenths of what we receive will, with the blessing of God, go further than the whole of it without His blessing. God is to come first in all our considerations; we are to:

Matthew 6

³³ Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...

Proverbs 3

⁹ Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase.

It makes no difference to us what is done with the tithe after we have paid it into the Lord's treasury. There our responsibility ends. We are to pay, even though it be destroyed.

Think of the multitude of offerings that were brought to the Lord merely to be burnt up. By this God would show the people that He did not need their gifts, and would remind them that He could support them even though all their property were destroyed.

This is especially necessary for us to remember in these days, just before the day of the Lord:

Joel 1

¹⁵ Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.

¹⁶ Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God?

¹⁷ The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered.

¹⁸ How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.

¹⁹ O Lord, to You will I cry: for the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned all the trees of the field.

²⁰ The beasts of the field cry also unto You: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Isaiah 34

⁸ For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

⁹ And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the

dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

Then it will be a grand thing to have learned that God alone is the hope and stay of His people.

The Basis of Stealing

Why is it that people steal? It is because they think that they have not enough, and they cannot trust God to supply their needs:

- Some do not know the Lord, and they suppose that they are obliged to look out for themselves.
- Others who profess to know the Lord, lose their supposed trust as soon as they see difficulty.

Therefore we see that the basis of what is generally recognized as stealing is identical with all distrust of God.

There are many who do not pay tithe, because they have never realized that it was a duty. "Will a man rob God?" Many do, who have never robbed their fellowmen, and who have a reputation for honesty.

The Lord says that the tenth belongs to Him. Then He ought to have it. But if I keep it and use it, knowing what the Bible says about it, how can my neighbor have confidence enough in me to trust me with what belongs to him? If a man will rob God, will he not rob his fellowman?

Dare anyone trust such a one? Yes; because there is a law against theft, and the man who steals from his neighbor is not only punished, but he loses credit and reputation.

The Lord does not demand His own immediately; He does not call for a settlement every month and every year; so in our blind selfishness we take liberties with Him, persuading ourselves that He does not see nor care.

Psalm 94

⁷ Yet they say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of

Jacob regard it.

And as nobody knows whether we pay tithe or not, we do not lose standing with men; or we may get the credit of paying tithe by paying a fragment of it, and calling it the tithe. That is, we are honest for appearance sake, and because of fear of the law.

Let us ask ourselves, is our supposed honesty only a sham, an outside show, and are we honest only because there is danger of being found out and punished if we are not so?

The Secret of All Honesty

One thing more. The Apostle Paul bears witness to the great liberality of the churches of Macedonia, in spite of their “great trial of affliction,” and “their deep poverty.” He did not need to plead with them to make an offering to the cause of God, but says,

2 Corinthians 8

¹To their power I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves,

²Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift...

The reason for this is that they...

⁵...first gave their own selves to the Lord...

This is the secret of all honesty; for whoever is honest with the Lord will never defraud any man. Not simply our property, but we ourselves belong to the Lord, and we are to render to Him His own. When we recognize that we are not our own, but that our whole being belongs to Him, we shall also recognize that we can have no property in our own right.

Strength is more than money; and the commandment “You shall not steal” forbids our robbing God of the strength that is His due. If I wantonly destroy my neighbor’s property it is the same as though I steal his goods. All our members belong to the Lord, as instruments of righteousness. If we misuse them

in any way, making them serve our own personal gratification, we are guilty of theft. We owe to the Lord, not merely all the strength we may have at this present moment, but all that we might have if we lived according to the law of life in Christ Jesus.

And here we see again that the commandment is life everlasting. All God's requirements are really statements of His promises. He asks nothing from us that He does not first give to us; and in making for it of us He does not ask that we give it to Him, in the sense that we ourselves are deprived of it, but that we always have it in possession to render to Him.

So the commandment "You shall not steal" requiring us to give all the strength of our soul and body to the Lord, means that if we heed His word He will see that we have perfect strength to give to Him. His commandments are not grievous, but on the contrary they assure us all blessings.

Everything grows with use, so as we keep the commandment, yielding to God all the strength which His own everlasting power works in us, we shall go from strength to strength, until at last we appear in Zion before God.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

If we were to attempt to enumerate and discuss all the ways in which this commandment may be and is broken, a whole volume would not be sufficient.

But that is not necessary. We do not need to know all the ways of error, in order to keep in the right way. The man who is in search of treasure does not care to know the roads that lead away from it; all that he desires is to know the one road that will bring him to the right place. There are many wrong ways, but only one right way; and if we spend our time exploring all the devious paths of error, we shall never know the way of truth.

Yet in the present condition of things, it is really necessary to call attention sharply to some particular sins, while presenting the commandment of truth; because many people are so fixed in a wrong course that scarcely anything less than an earthquake will move them.

They will listen to the commandment which forbids what they are doing, and will think that it commends their actions. One must put his finger upon the particular act, and say, "That is sin," before they will have any sense of wrong-doing. Thousands of people read the fourth commandment every week, and honestly think that they are obeying it in keeping Sunday; and many people take the name of the Lord in vain in various ways, without any consciousness of so doing.

"Polite Lying"

Custom lies at the foundation of a large amount of the violation of the commandments, the ninth no less than the others. What "everybody does" is supposed to be justifiable. The

custom of the people is responsible for a great deal of what is known as “polite lying.”

God forbid that any of us should be any less courteous than we are; we certainly do not need to cultivate rudeness; but there is a false standard of politeness, and it is the one too often followed. The sort of politeness that depends upon falsehood is evidently not true courtesy; for

1 John 2

²¹ ...no lie is of the truth.

And truth cannot come from lying. The same Scriptures that command us not to bear false witness, also tell us to:

1 Peter 3

⁸ ...be pitiful be courteous.

Therefore we know that the most perfect courtesy is compatible with perfect truthfulness, and cannot exist without it.

Laziness and cowardice are at the bottom of a great deal of this “polite lying.” It comes so easy for even Christians themselves to follow the universal custom of saying things to please people, and lightly to make promises that they do not expect ever to perform.

The customer wishes the goods delivered immediately, and the professed Christian tradesman will promise to send them, well knowing that he cannot do so for hours; yet he will not think that he has lied. He did not do so deliberately, but it was so easy to please the customer by making the promise, and then trust to some excuse to pacify him if he afterwards complained.

“The Accuser of the Brethren”

Satan, who is a liar and the father of it, is also called:

Revelation 12

¹⁰ ...the accuser of the brethren...

He accuses them before God day and night. Now Satan

would know better than to try to make the Lord believe that a person has committed a sin of which he is not guilty. He well knows that no act escapes the eye of the Lord, and that it is useless to try to make Him believe that He has overlooked some fault.

Therefore it follows that in accusing the brethren before God, Satan confines himself to the things that they have actually done. Where then is the wrong? Just here:

Romans 8

³³ It is God that justifies.

And whoever lays anything to the charge of God's elect brings false witness against God as well as against the brethren. When God has forgiven a man, it is a grievous sin to accuse the man of sin. Whoever brings up that fault and talks about it to the man's detriment, is doing the devil's work.

There is no meaner way of serving the devil than to charge against a person the sin that he has confessed. As soon as a person confesses his sin, God calls him righteous; to call him guilty then, is to bear false witness against both man and God.

Losing Confidence

How many there are who cruelly suspect a person, and always treat him as untrustworthy, because of some sin or sins in the past. It matters not that he has confessed his fault, he is still held under suspicion. Some will say,

“We know that he has fallen once, and he may again.”

Yes; and so may the critic. Just as though no man in this world is guilty, except the one whose sin has become public property! The fact that a man has fallen into any kind of sin is no evidence whatever in itself that he will do the same thing again.

On the contrary if he has voluntarily, under the influence of the Spirit of God, confessed his sin (and no one ever volun-

tarily confesses a fault unless he is prompted by the Spirit), that is the best possible evidence that he will be on his guard. If a man has lied to me, and of his own free will comes to me and confesses it, I can have more confidence in him than ever before.

When a sin has been confessed, we must beware of bearing false witness by our condemnation. It is a terrible thing to condemn where God justifies.

This applies when the sinner is ourselves, just as much as when it is somebody else. When we have confessed our sin to the Lord, He has forgiven it, and we have no right to go on condemning ourselves. We are not our own; we belong to the Lord: and, leaving ourselves out of the question, we must not dare think that He has not forgiven, when He says that He has.

How many there are who would place the most implicit trust in the word of a neighbor, but who do not regard it as a sin to contradict the Word of God, thus charging Him falsely.

Taking the Risk of Lying

If we ever repeat any story about anybody, we are never safe from the possibility of having lied. In the first place, there is always the possibility of being mistaken: our informant may not have known all the facts, and it may be that the person talked about has done nothing amiss. And in the second place, even if he were guilty, he may have confessed it to God, and been forgiven, before the story reached the ears of any other person.

We may say that we certainly would not repeat anything against a person, if we knew that the person had repented; but as long as we do not know that he has not, we are assuming all the risk of lying, both against God and man, when we take up a reproach against our neighbor.

Tale-Bearing

Many people seem to think that any amount of gossip is justified, provided one does not tell willful lies. But the Bible says that the one who shall abide in the holy hill of the Lord is he who:

Psalm 15

³ ...backbites not with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.

That is as much as to say that he who has taken up a reproach against his neighbor, will not dwell in the tabernacle of God.

Aside from any other reason, it is a fact that it is next to impossible, if not quite, to talk about another's doings or sayings, and speak the exact truth. If we go so far as to tell his sentiments, or to judge his motives, then it is absolutely certain that we shall be guilty of falsehood; for nobody can state another person's belief, or tell what somebody else thinks. We shall at least tell that which we do not certainly know; and whoever does that is to all intents and purposes a liar.

If we tell the truth on any such occasion, it is only by accident. The love of making an accusation is so strong that we are often willing to run the risk of telling an untruth, rather than miss the chance of being the first to tell the news.

If we were called upon to testify in court, we should not be allowed to repeat what we had only heard. We must confine ourselves to what has come under our own observation. Even then it is difficult enough to tell the exact truth. Shall we dare be any less particular as God's witnesses than we are required to be as witnesses for the State?

Superfluous Words

There is a thing spoken of in the fifth chapter of *Matthew*, which is not usually understood as coming under the head of the ninth commandment, but is commonly referred to the

third. Jesus says,

Matthew 5

³³ You have heard that it has been said by them of old time,
You shall not forswear yourself, but shall perform unto the
Lord your oaths;

³⁴ But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven for
it is God's throne;

³⁵ Nor by the earth for it is His footstool; neither by
Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

³⁶ Neither shall you swear by your head, because you can not
make one hair white or black.

³⁷ But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for
whatsoever is more than these comes of evil.

This refers to ordinary conversation, and not to the giving of testimony in a court of law. The Saviour Himself gave testimony under oath, before the Jewish Council. The man who always tells the truth, and speaks nothing else can take a judicial oath without any fear.

So the injunction, "Swear not at all," does not refer to this, any more than it refers to the taking of the name of the Lord in vain. The reference is to the strong assertions and pledges with which people are apt to back up their statements, in order to give them weight.

One will say,

"If this is not so, you may have my head for a football."

Now his head is not his own to give away, and he has no right to pawn his life in support of anything he may say.

Psalm 24

¹ The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof...

Therefore we have no right to pledge anything in heaven or earth in substantiation of our assertions.

Some people seem unable to make a simple statement of fact, unaccompanied by something to make it emphatic. In

this they show a lack of confidence in their own word, and unconsciously proclaim that their unsupported word is not to be believed. Unfortunately that which they rely on to substantiate it adds no force to it whatever.

The Bible rule is to tell the simple, unvarnished truth, and let the matter rest there. Thoughtful people will attach more weight to that than to anything else. They will understand that the person so speaking is accustomed to being believed, and that is the same as saying that he is accustomed to telling the truth. Anything more than the simplest statement of fact is of evil.

Practical Joking

Who has not heard people seek to justify themselves for some false statement made to some unsuspecting individual, by saying,

“Oh, it was only in fun!”

They wished to see how credulous the person was, and to make sport of his innocence. Then if any inconvenience or calamity results from taking the joke as a serious matter, the joker coolly throws the blame upon the deceived one, saying,

“He ought to have known that I was joking.”

That is to say, he ought to have known that you were lying; he ought to have been so well informed as to your reputation, that he would not suppose you to be telling the truth, unless he was especially assured of the fact. How lightly the practical joker holds his character and reputation!

Do you wish to know how the Scriptures regard the sort of “fun” that consists in deceiving an unsuspecting person? Read this:

Proverbs 26

¹⁸ As a madman who casts firebrands, arrows, and death,

¹⁹ So is the man that deceives his neighbor, and says, Am not I in sport?

Would you think it a light matter if a man should throw a lot of live coals into a crowded room? or if he should begin shooting on the street? or if he should scatter poison in the fields, or in the springs of water? Nothing more terrible can be thought of; yet that is just the character of the practical joker.

The man who tells lies in earnest has at least some hoped-for object to gain; but the man who tells lies in sport proclaims himself a fool. There are no more dangerous pests in the world.

The Root of the Matter

But let us now come to the very heart of the subject. If there is truth in the inward parts, there will be no outward manifestation of falsehood. Christ is the Truth; therefore when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, none of the errors to which we have referred will be seen in the life; for He came to bear witness to the truth.

John 18

³⁷ To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.

He is called:

Revelation 3

¹⁴ ...the faithful and true Witness.

To us is given the high honor of being classed with him; for God says:

Isaiah 43

¹⁰ You are My witnesses, and My servant whom I have chosen.

Further on we read:

²¹ This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth

My praise.

God made man, just as He made everything else, to be a revelation of Himself.

1 Peter 2

⁹You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The inanimate creation is true to its calling, witnessing for God. See *Acts* 14:17. The everlasting power and Divinity of God have from the creation of the world until now been clearly revealed in the things that He has made. Only man has proved false to his trust, defacing the image of God, and repressing the truth in unrighteousness.

Yet even in fallen humanity God's faithfulness and truth are to be seen; for every sinner is an unconscious witness to the long-suffering of God. The man who blasphemes the name of God, and even denies His existence, is a monument of His tender mercy. It is a fact that "all men are liars;" for while they were made in the image of God, to reveal His character, they exhibit the opposite. *Psalms* 116:11.

Yet,

Romans 3

⁷We can do nothing against the truth but for the truth.

No matter how much we try to work against it, God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and so the truth of God more abounds through our lie unto His glory. *Romans* 3:7.

That is to say, God will see to it that His will is done, even in spite of man; and He will make them the agents of it; but they will have none of the benefit of it, because it is done against their will.

Strife and Falsehood

The commandments are all linked together; no one can break one of them without violating the whole. We have read that whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and in like manner we find that he is a liar as well. The Apostle James says,

James 3

¹⁴ If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Christ is the truth, and He is meek and lowly in heart. Now it is a fact that He is come in the flesh, so that every man who cherishes or exhibits bitterness or wrath denies the presence of Christ in the flesh. He holds down the truth in unrighteousness.

The Ultimate Test: Confessing or Denying Christ

In *1 John* chapter 2, we have the whole case summed up in a single question:

1 John 2

²² Who is a liar, but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?

The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, is a liar, and according to this question, nobody else is a liar. Now we have traced falsehood to its lair, and can identify it in its very beginning.

If a man has not denied that Jesus is the Christ, he is not a liar; but if he has denied this truth, he is a liar though he never speaks. If you wish to stop lying, you must go to the root of the matter. You may tear off a limb here, and pluck out an evil habit there; but until Jesus is fully recognized and acknowledged as the Christ of God, the lying disposition exists.

Peter at one time denied the Lord, but he did nothing more than every man has done.

1 John 4

² Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that con-

fesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God;
³ And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is
come in the flesh is not of God.

Moreover,

1 John 5

¹ Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of
God...

and

¹⁸ ...whosoever is born of God sins not.

By putting these statements together, and thinking carefully over them, we may see that every sin that we commit is a denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,—a denial that He is the Son of God,—and therefore that it marks us as liars. We are told,

Romans 10

⁸ The Word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart.

Christ is the Word, and it is by His presence that even sinners live. So we read further:

⁹ If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

We can confess only that which already is so. It is a truth, therefore, that Christ is come in the flesh of every man, and that whoever will confess His presence has salvation. But to confess Christ,—to confess that He is come in the flesh,—is to say from the heart what the Apostle Paul wrote:

Galatians 2

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

To confess Jesus, therefore, is to be just as He was—to allow

Him to dwell in us, and to speak and act through us. If this be the case, we cannot help telling the truth, since He is the truth; and if this be not the case, our whole life will be a lie. The man who has not Christ abiding in him cannot help being a liar.

So the only way any man can keep the ninth commandment is to give himself wholly to the Lord, to be used by Him according to His good pleasure.

1 John 5

⁶ It is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Christ said:

Acts 1

⁸ You shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses.

Only as one has the Spirit of truth, can one be capable of telling the truth.

Witnesses to the Truth

Jesus said,

John 18

³⁷ To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.

Again,

John 20

²¹ ...as My Father has sent Me, even so send I you.

A great mistake that many people make is to suppose that they cannot witness for the truth unless they do a great deal of talking. Just as it is possible for a person to act a lie, so may one act the truth. Often our testimony to others would be a great deal stronger if we kept our mouth shut. It is not necessary for us to be always in an attitude of "defense." We are not obliged, as witnesses to the truth, to answer every objection

that cavilers bring. The Lord says,

Isaiah 42

¹⁹ Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I sent? Who is blind as He that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's Servant?

²⁰ Seeing many things, but You observe not; opening the ears, but He hears not.

Jesus is the Truth and the Life. His life was sufficient witness to the truth; then when He spoke, His words were faithful testimony, because He spoke just what He was.

Receiving the Truth

It is a common thing to hear that such a one has received the truth. What is it to accept the truth? It is to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as one's own personal Saviour. No matter how correct anybody's belief is as to form, he has not the truth unless he has Christ within.

Unless a man knows the Lord, he does not even know what the truth is; how then can he tell the truth? To accept the truth, therefore, is no light thing. It is not merely to want it, but to be transformed by it.

Believing for Another—Disbelieving God

This is an impossibility. We often hear a man say:

“I can believe for others, but I cannot believe for myself. I can believe that God forgives and saves my brother, but I cannot believe that He saves me.”

This is the worst sort of deception. It is real nonsense. One cannot play fast and loose with the truth in that way. Whoever really believes the Lord, believes Him all the time. The Lord does not change, and He does not display partiality. Therefore if He can be believed at all, He must be believed all the time.

1 John 5

¹⁰ He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself; he that believes not God has made Him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of His Son.

¹¹ And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life.

Whoever disbelieves God to the slightest extent, makes Him out to be a liar. But God is not a liar. He “cannot lie”. *Titus* 1:2. Therefore whoever charges God with lying is himself a liar. And whoever does not believe, does this. Therefore every person who does not believe that God has given eternal life, everlasting salvation, to him personally, is a liar of the worst sort.

Let no one persuade himself that he thinks well of God, unless he believes with absolute certainty that God saves him. Don't talk about believing that He will save somebody else, but not you. If God is true, you can believe Him all the time, when He speaks to you as well as when He speaks to somebody else. What would you think if a man should say to you,

“I can believe everything you say, when I hear you talking to somebody else; but as soon as you begin to talk to me I lose all confidence in you, and think that you are lying.”

Would you think that he had a very high opinion of you? Yet that is the way many people regard the Lord, and they are not ashamed to talk such feelings out right before His face.

Saved from Lying

You say,

“Well, then, I am lost, for I have lied all my life.”

No; you are not lost, for Christ has given Himself to you, and since He is the truth He saves you from all untruth. All His commandments are promises; so when He says that we shall not bear false witness against our neighbor, He means that He will see to it that we witness to the truth, if we but re-

ceive Him.

Christ died for the ungodly, for all the ungodly; therefore the sum of all lying, in fact, the only lie we can really tell, is to neglect this great salvation. It is the same as saying either that Christ has not died, or else that His death is not sufficient ransom. But, on the other hand, as soon as we accept salvation, our whole life of lying ceases.

It is not enough to be on our guard against falsehood; we must submit to the truth. We must by yielding bear witness to the fact that God is abundantly able to do all that He has undertaken. His word is true from the beginning, and is settled for ever in heaven; therefore we may depend upon it. It will not fail us. God Himself has such confidence in it that He says to every one who takes Him at His word,

Exodus 20

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness.

John 8

³¹ If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed;

³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20

¹⁷ You shall not covet...

We come now to the last of the series. We have completed the circle, and end just where we began. We say that we end just where we began; for the ninth commandment says,

³ You shall not have any other gods before Me.

And in *Colossians* we read:

Colossians 3

⁵ ...covetousness, which is idolatry.

The Infinite Circle of the Law

The law of God is a complete circle, beginning and ending in God; or, rather, having neither beginning nor end. God inhabits eternity, and the circle of His law encompasses the universe. There is nothing in heaven or earth that does not come within the circle. Its range is unlimited.

Romans 3 [RV]

¹⁹ We know that what things soever the law says, it speaks to them that are under the law [literally, “in the law,” that is, “within the range, sphere or jurisdiction of the law”]: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under under judgment of God.

Going Outside the Law

What is sin?

1 John 3

⁴ Sin is the transgression of the law.

What does “transgression” mean? It means “a going across.” Sin, therefore is the act of going across God’s law. But when one transgresses,—goes outside the bounds—of God’s law, where can he go? Ah, that is a pertinent pertinent question.

There is no place for one to go outside of God's law, except to go out of the universe, that is, to cease to be.

Romans 6

²³ The wages of sin is death.

James 1

¹⁵ ...sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

This can be made apparent in another manner. The law of God is His life, flowing in an endless stream from His throne. Now wherever the word of God has free course, there is perfect life. If we allow ourselves to be simply channels for the river of life, as we are designed to be, the life flowing through us will hold us in life.

But what will take place if we put ourselves squarely across the stream? Everybody knows the result of placing any obstacle in the way of a stream of water. The first thing is a damming up of the stream, and when water is dammed up, and becomes stagnant, it breeds death, until the force of the on-coming stream breaks away all the barriers, and the waters flow on again unhindered. But that is the destruction of the thing that placed itself across the current.

It is infinitely better to be in the line of life, in harmony with it,—channels for the stream of life,—than to be obstacles to be swept away.

God's Mercy to Transgressors

You say that there are many people who transgress God's law, and yet live. Yes there are, and that is one of the greatest marvels of the grace of God. Unbelievers rail against God, charging Him with injustice, because the sentence of death is pronounced upon the ungodly; but they forget that the infinite mercy of God is manifested every moment in keeping them in life, to allow them opportunity to come into harmony with it, so that they need not die.

This life is but a span, a moment long as it seems to short-

sighted men, it is but the twinkling of an eye to God. We do not at once see the results of the transgression of God's law, and men fancy that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, as they reckon time, they can sin with impunity.

Proverbs 29

¹ He, that being often reprov'd hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Not Imputing Their Trespasses Unto Them

The reason why men who transgress the law do not instantly die, is that...

2 Corinthians 5

¹⁹ ...God [is still] in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;

Psalms 130

³ If You, Lord, should mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.

God does not now impute sin to men; but takes it all on Himself. He knows that men are foolish and ignorant, and...

Hebrews 5

² [He has] compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.

Knowing their ignorance, He does not take them at their word, when they say that they do not wish to be kept within the bounds of His life,—that they wish to be free from its “restraints,” as they call it, and to live their own lives, independently of Him.

His long-suffering still waits as in the days of Noah; but by and by there will come a day when sufficient light will have shone to enable every one to make a final choice; and then those who deliberately choose to go outside of God's law, will be taken at their word, and will be allowed to go—where? Where can they go, when God's law fills the universe, and

they go outside? For them there will be no future:

Obadiah 1

¹⁶ ...they shall be as though they had not been.

Summarizes all the Commandments

In the tenth commandment, more than in any other, the unity of the entire law is seen. It summarizes all the commandments, even as the first of them does. It takes in the whole duty of man.

Exodus 20

¹⁷ You shall not covet...

This precept underlies and is the heart of every commandment.

Romans 7

⁷ I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet.

Someone says,

“I thought lust had to do with the seventh commandment.”

So it has, and with every other one as well. Lust simply means desire; and since in the fall the desire of mankind is only to evil, lust has degenerated into evil desire, it makes no difference for what. A desire for anything that is forbidden is lust, and is contrary to the whole law of God.

James 1

¹⁵ When lust has conceived it brings forth sin.

So we see that the tenth commandment strikes at the root of all sin. The Apostle Paul takes it and, makes it the summing up of the whole law. He who keeps the tenth commandment, cannot so much as think of breaking any other; he cannot have the slightest idea to sin.

Spirituality of the Law

Romans 7

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual.

And this commandment reveals its spirituality more clearly than any other. Men talk about enforcing the law of God,—about incorporating the divine law into human laws. They fancy that because human laws punish the person who kills another, that they are putting the sixth commandment into effect. They imagine that they are safeguarding the seventh commandment, because there are laws against adultery. It is a very common thing for people to think that they can enforce the fourth commandment. But let them try it with the tenth. How will they succeed?

Well, men have actually been so blindly presumptuous as to try to enforce the tenth commandment. There was only one way, and that was by the Inquisition, invented by the Papacy, which exalted itself to God's place, and even above Him. Men were tortured to wring out of them the secrets of their hearts, and punished for even the thought that they confessed to having harbored.

But nobody but God can find out the secrets of men's hearts, and He does not have to find them out, because,

Hebrews 4

¹³ ...all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

So no human power or wisdom can ever determine when the tenth commandment has been broken. When the thought of sin, which is forbidden by the tenth commandment, goes so far as to manifest itself, it comes under the head of some one of the other commandments. To take a neighbor's wife is a violation of the seventh commandment; to seize upon his house or goods, is a violation of the eighth.

So we see that this tenth commandment deals with that which is all within one's own mind, and is simply the drawing

out and summing up of the entire ten. It shows the breadth and spirituality of the whole law of God; for as we have previously learned,

Matthew 5

²⁸ Whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

It is not necessary that one shall have carried his wrong desire into execution, in order to have violated any one of the commandments.

Proverbs 24

⁹ The thought of foolishness is sin.

The tenth commandment is no more spiritual than any other; but it makes the spirituality of the law more apparent than the others do, in that the violation of it is wholly within one's heart, out of sight from all human eyes; yet one cannot break any one of the first nine commandments without first breaking the tenth; and as soon as one has broken the tenth, all the rest are broken.

Thus we see the utter futility of all human attempts to execute the law of God, or to punish transgression of it. Such attempts cannot be made except by those who do not have any sort of just comprehension of the law, and the nature of it; and that is why every effort to enforce or execute God's law results in a perversion of it. It is only a perverted view of the law that men have, who think to take it into their own hands, and so what they enforce is not God's law, but something directly opposed to it.

This appears when we consider all so-called "Sabbath laws." They are of course Sunday laws. Men will in the same breath talk about the sacredness of the fourth commandment, and about the necessity of rest for the body one day in seven, and of securing it by legislation in favor of Sunday.

But the fourth commandment contains no reference to Sun-

day, except to tell all men that in it they may labor, and do their own work, and, moreover, the Sabbath of the Lord is not merely physical rest, but is spiritual rest,—God’s rest—for God is Spirit.

The tenth commandment, therefore, closes up the circle of the law, and unites the two ends, and then surrounds the circle itself, bidding everybody to keep his hands off from it, and leave God to conduct the affairs of every portion of His universal kingdom, even to putting into us the desires that we ought to cherish.

Exodus 20

¹⁷ You shall not covet...

Covetousness is idolatry. This is indicated in:

1 Timothy 6

¹⁷ Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

As you read this, remember the words of Christ:

Luke 12

¹⁵ Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

And then follows the story of the man whose ground brought forth abundantly, and whose barns were overflowing, and who proposed to say to his soul:

¹⁹ Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

That man was trusting in uncertain riches, instead of in the living God, who had given him his abundance. Instead of trusting God, whom he could not see, he made a god of that which he could see, and his hands could handle.

The Love of Money

1 Timothy 6

⁹ They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all evil [all kinds of evil]; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Mind, the text does not say that money is an evil, or the root of evil. It is the love of money that works mischief. There have been very wealthy men, who were also patterns of goodness.

Job had the testimony from God Himself that he was a good man, yet he was the wealthiest man in the country. But he did not trust in his riches. He was willing to distribute and the cause which he did not know he searched out; and when his wealth was taken from him in a day he was not in the least upset by it. He still trusted in God who had given it, and who was able to care for him without it.

Hoarding means Poverty

Proverbs 11

²⁴ There is that scatters, and yet increases; and there is that withholds more than is meet, but it tends to poverty.

It is a law of God's universe that what is hoarded up withers away, and that which is scattered abroad increases. It is not money that is the evil, but the love of it which leads one to hoard it up merely to look at, or as a fancied security against future need. Hoarding up wealth not only tends to poverty, but it is a sign of it. The miser has a constant sense of lack. The old epitaph on a miser who had heaped up thousands, ended thus:

Yet this poor man, with all his store,
Died in great want,—the want of more.

The man of small means, who freely divides what he has with others, is the real rich man. His action shows his recognition of the fact that he is in connection with a boundless store of wealth. A small stream of water constantly flowing is far better than thousands of barrels of it stored up in a cistern.

Riches are not Robbery

There seems to be in this age a special onslaught against rich men, as though to be rich were synonymous with being a robber. Corrupt practices are not to be defended; but we are not warranted in attributing all evil to men of means. There is just as much covetousness among the poor as among the rich.

The man who covets wealth, and succeeds in getting it is certainly no worse than the one who covets it, but fails to grasp it. It is covetousness, not the possession of wealth that is idolatry. It is not how much one has, but how one uses it, that determines his character.

Content with Food and Raiment

The word “covetousness” is translated from a number of different words, but as used in our study it means to desire more than one needs. If a man has no coat, it is not a sin for him to desire it sufficiently to make the effort to get it. This is compatible with perfect contentment, for contentment does not mean lazy indifference.

1 Timothy 6

⁸ Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.

The evil arises from this, that people think that they must specify just how much and what kind of food and clothing they shall have. The principal thing for now is contentment; God has charged Himself with the task of seeing that we have food and clothing sufficient for our needs.

He made the first clothing that man ever wore (*Genesis* 3:21) and it filled every requirement; it supplied covering and

warmth. God is zealous for the carrying out of His own laws; and since He has ordained that every creature should have a covering suited to its state, we may be sure that He will not neglect the creatures whose need is greatest and most apparent.

Just a word with regard to clothing. Do not forget that its true object is comfort and decency, and not adornment. It should simply be that which is suitable, and then one need have no fear of its being in bad taste.

When one is specially noticeable because of what one has on, that is just as bad taste as to be noticeable because of a lack of clothing. One should be noticed, if noticed at all, for what one is, and not for what one has or has not.

The clothing, which is not part of the individual, is altogether secondary to the clothing which grows on one as the result of the Spirit within. A knowledge of the relative value of things, and that God Himself, who gives us life, and who thereby shows that it is His business to supply the things necessary for its proper sustenance, and that He alone can do it, will bring constant and perfect content.

Contentment not Laziness

Someone may say,

“That doctrine will tend to laziness; if the stimulus of the necessity to earn one’s own living be taken away,—if men get the idea that God will provide everything for them,—they will not labor.”

Not so; the man who serves the living God can never be lazy. We have learned that man is not to work for money, but because he owes his best service to the world. The man who knows the Lord, and who understands his relation to Him, will work just as hard and as diligently without any prospect of wages, as he will for a large salary, knowing that it is his business to give his strength so the world, in the service of

Christ, and it is the Lord's business to sustain his life.

Discontent or Worry is Covetousness and Idolatry

Look again at what constitutes covetousness. We have all thought that it consisted in not desiring a rich man's possessions, but we shall see that it comes much closer to us than that. Jesus says:

Matthew 6

³⁰ If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

³² For after all these things do the Gentiles [heathen] seek.

We see from this that anxiety for food and drink and clothing, is the characteristic of the heathen, and is therefore idolatry. So again we are brought face to face with the truth that covetousness is idolatry.

Matthew 6

²⁴ You cannot serve God and Mammon.

We cannot be worrying over what we have not, or over the loss of something that we had, and at the same time be serving God. Everything in this world belongs to somebody; therefore if we covet something that we have not we are coveting what belongs to somebody else, and are also wishing to deprive some other person of something in order that we may be pleased. But that is not to love our neighbor as ourself, and so is a violation of the whole law.

Or, if it be claimed that there is a great deal that is not in the possession of anybody, and which is therefore open to all, we must still admit that it belongs to the Lord, who will put us in the way of getting it, if it be right for us to have it. And if we complain because we have it not, we are manifesting a lack of trust in God's loving care for us.

Absolute Trust in Our Father

See how this commandment teaches us absolute trust in God, which is the perfection of Christianity. The Lord knows what we have need of before we ask Him, and He has provided it before we become conscious of our need, just because He is our Father.

We have much to learn from the relation between parent and child. We are to receive the kingdom of God as little children; and the child is the perfect example of trust and content, yet it is not lazy. The unspoiled child, or the child yet too young to have learned any of that worldly wisdom that consists in worry (dignified by the title of “looking out for the future”) expects as a matter of course to have its wants supplied, and it is content with what it receives. It never thinks of food until it is hungry, and then it receives the necessary supply, because the parents have anticipated the little one’s needs. Why cannot those parents learn a lesson from themselves? Why should they think that they are better than their Father?

Trust, not Idleness

But the child is not idle; far from it. There is nothing more active than a healthy child. The father does not work so many hours a day, nor apply himself so persistently as his child does. It will work the whole day for nothing. To no purpose, do you say? Oh, no; it is obeying the Scripture injunction,

Ecclesiastes 9

¹⁰ Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

Laziness is an acquired habit, the result of wrong training by parents. It is only the man who thinks that the responsibility of the world rests upon him, that works to no purpose; for he goes about his tasks with a drawn, set face, and a look of anxiety, which reflects no credit whatever upon the God whom he may be professing to serve. And remember that the sole business of man on this earth is to glorify God.

Saying, "There is No God"

People become sad and moody under their self-imposed burdens. That is equivalent to saying that there is no God.

Psalm 53

¹ The fool says in his heart, There is no God.

And he acts as though there were none, and that the weight of the world, and the responsibility for conducting its affairs, properly rests on him. Having an abundance of goods in one's possession, and trusting in them, is not a whit worse than worrying over the lack of them. The one who does this, shows that he would do just as the rich fool did, if he were but situated in the same way.

The Truest Happiness

The rich man does not have all the pleasures of life. The best things in the world are those that money cannot buy; and the possession of great wealth actually hinders one from enjoying some of the most delicious pleasures.

One of these is the pleasure of self-denial, of going without a thing that one might lawfully possess. There is the pleasure of royalty in finding oneself independent of things which most people deem necessary. The real king is not the one who has everything at command, but the one who can command himself to be content with little, and can cheerfully obey.

The Sum of the Whole Matter

The sum of the whole matter is to trust God, and be satisfied with the fatness of His house, even though to the man who blindly burrows in the earth like a mole, it may seem leanness. This absolute trust in the Lord is absolute righteousness, the very opposite of heathenism.

Psalm 119

³⁶ Incline my heart unto Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.

Covetousness, therefore, is the desire for anything contrary to the commandments, anything except God's life. That we may desire with our whole soul.

Psalm 73

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none on earth that I desire beside You.

The man who can say that to the Lord, is safe from the transgression of the tenth commandment, and so from the commission of any sin.

Satisfaction in Service

The commandments of the Lord are life everlasting,
" and in keeping of them is great reward."

Not *for* keeping them, mind you, but *in* keeping them. The reward is the pure, perfect, simple life that they bring.

Take heed, beware of covetousness even in the service of God. Beware of thinking that you would serve God, keep His Sabbath, for instance, if you were situated financially so that you could. There would be no virtue in your service even if you did keep it under such conditions. What kind of god is it that you propose to serve? Is it one who needs your service? or one whom you need to serve, because the service itself is a rich reward? The answer to this marks the difference between heathenism and Christianity.

The satisfaction of serving Christ indeed, of knowing Him, and feeling His life in us, impelling us to action, is so great that with it one cares for nothing else. The deliciousness of perfect trust, of resting in the everlasting arms, and by that very resting partaking of their intense activity, is greater than the possession of all riches. He who has, and appropriates, the fulness of God's life is so far from desiring anything else, that he would spurn the offer of anything that would rob him of any of that which is his by faith.

Romans 8

³² He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

And he who has all things, and knows that he has them, is absolutely shut off from the possibility of covetousness.

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

We have been studying the commandments, taking each in detail; and considering a little of its breadth. Now we want a little glimpse of the law as a whole. It must be a very brief one, for so comprehensive a subject.

There is much misunderstanding about the law. Men have made so many difficulties that do not exist. The difficulties are not in the Bible, but in us.

It is not because the sun is not shining every day, that the blind man cannot see it; the defect is in his eyes. The Bible itself has no difficulties; there are in it some things hard to be understood, but it is only the unstable and unlearned who wrest them to their own destruction. It is not the sun's fault that its rays do not penetrate a piece of clay.

When the veil of unbelief is removed, and our hearts lose their opacity, things that have seemed dark will be found to be bright light. A child can understand where philosophers stumble.

I once heard a man who had himself been but a year out of the gutter, conduct a mission service. He read a chapter of the Bible that is thought very difficult, and which I myself had in times past had some difficulty with. He made some comments as he read, and I never heard the chapter set forth more clearly and simply in my life. He did not know of any difficulty there, and he made none; he simply read the Word, and understood it, unconscious of the fact that theologians regarded it as a puzzle. It spoke to him, and he received it without any trouble.

The deep things of God are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. The one who has the simplicity of a child to receive and to learn, will find that the so-called

difficulties have vanished.

When we read something about the law, many people say,

“Oh, but that is the ceremonial law!”

They think thus to avoid the duty. They forget that such a term as “ceremonial law” is not to be found in the Bible.

“But does not the Bible speak of two laws?”

It speaks of more than two; but in this study we shall speak of only two distinct laws, as easy to distinguish as daylight from midnight darkness,—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and the law of sin and death.

In the third chapter of *Romans* the Apostle speaks of these two laws as the law of works and the law of faith, and sets forth the way of salvation.

Romans 3

²⁰ ...by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The law of works is bondage, for...

Galatians 3

¹⁰ ...as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

The law of faith is life, for

Romans 8

¹ There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Letter and Spirit

In the third chapter of *2 Corinthians* these two laws are again set forth and contrasted.

2 Corinthians 3

⁶ ...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ If the ministration of death written and engraven in stone

was glorious, how much more shall the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory, etc.

Here we have the ministration of condemnation and death, and the ministration of righteousness and life. But the two came at the same time, and were both revealed at Mount Sinai. The ministration of death was that which was written and engraven in stones; the ministration of life flowed from the lips and heart of Christ before the tables of stone were made.

What! The ten commandments death? Yes,

Romans 7

⁵ For when we were in the flesh the motions of sins which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

1 Corinthians 15

⁵⁶ The strength of sin is the law.

And yet at the same time the commandments of God are life and peace:

Romans 7

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual...

And he in whom the law is in truth, has life and peace:

Romans 8

² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

A little study of the giving of the law will enable every soul to determine whether he is in the bondage of sin and death or in the freedom of the Spirit of life.

God called Moses up into the mount, and said,

Exodus 19

³ ...Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:

⁴ You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.

⁵ Now therefore if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then shall you be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine;

⁶ And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

The point in this is that He brought them unto Himself. In the third chapter of first Peter we are told:

1 Peter 3

¹⁸ For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

We are separated from God by our sins, and Christ suffered that He might bring us nigh to God. God was bringing the children of Israel to Himself; and Christ was the Leader who went before the armies of Israel in the pillar of fire, to accomplish this end. He is the Deliverer, and He it was who was carrying Israel and bringing them to God. They had seen how He was doing it; they had seen Christ set forth crucified among them.

This was God's promise:

“You shall be a kingdom of priests, if you keep My covenant.”

Mark that God did not say,

“If you will perform My promise.”

He never expects anyone to perform His promises, but He fulfills them Himself. Our part is simply to accept and hold fast to them, and then as He fulfills them we get all the blessedness of it. His covenant is His promise.

“If you will keep My covenant, keep the faith, I will do all this for you.”

By His exceeding great and precious promises we are made partakers of the Divine nature, made kings and priests. God reminded them of what He had done:

“You have seen My way of working, now hold fast to My promise, and I will fulfill all My word to you.”

Grasping a Shadow instead of the Substance

Three days after sending the Israelites this message, God spoke the law, in the midst of such grandeur as will never be seen in this earth again until Christ comes and shakes not the earth only, but also heaven. The people were terrified, and said,

Exodus 20

¹⁹ Let not God speak with us, lest we die.

Moses told them not to be afraid, and he himself drew near to the thick darkness; but the people stood afar off. When he came down from the mount, his face shone so that the people were afraid to come near him, and he had to put a veil over his face for their sakes.

So instead of receiving the glory, they shut it out. Instead of receiving the ministration of life, they received the ministration of death. Instead of receiving the substance, they got the shadow. Instead of becoming a kingdom of priests, only one tribe received the priesthood, and they were not priests indeed, for they served only the shadow. Instead of the real law of which the body is Christ, they got only “the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.” *Romans 2:20*.

The boast of the Jews was the law; but the one who really knows the law will make his boast in God, for in Christ is the perfect law of liberty. When the Apostle Peter says that we are a kingdom of priests, he says that when we come to Christ, the living Stone, we also become living stones, a house that grows into a holy temple:

1 Peter 2

⁴ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

⁵ You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a

holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be confounded.

⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Christ is the Living Stone, and those who do not receive Him indeed, get the law on dead tables of stone that can do nothing for them but fall upon them and kill them. They get only form and ceremony.

Drinking the Law in the Living Rock

A living picture was before the children of Israel when the law was spoken, so that they need not have got mere form instead of reality. The people had been famishing for water, and when Moses at the command of God struck the rock, water had gushed from it, and was even then flowing in the dry places like a river.

Psalm 114

⁸ [God] turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

That solid rock became water, and yet existed there as rock nevertheless. Such is the infinite variety of the forms of God's life.

Christ stood on the rock, and He is the Rock, the Living Stone. The law is in His heart, and when He came, it was prophesied:

Isaiah 42

²¹ ...he will magnify the law, and make it honorable.

John 1

¹⁴ [In Him] the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

The Lord would have us know that the very mountain that

burned with fire was pouring forth the word of life. The statutes and judgments were commanded in Horeb for the people, but the rock was there pouring out a stream of life for them. The mountain that it was death to touch, was sending forth rivers of life.

That mountain was the dwelling place of God for the time; it was His throne, and from the throne flows forth a pure river of water of life. Out of the throne also proceed thunders, lightnings, and voices. *Revelation 4:5*. That same throne that burns with fire, and from which come thunders and lightnings, is the throne to which we are invited to come boldly.

The Law from the Cross

You say,

“We would rather come to the cross of Christ, and Him crucified.”

But this is Christ crucified. Have you never read, that when Christ was crucified there was an earthquake, and darkness and terror? But at the same time the stream flowed from His wounded side to convey life. At Sinai you have the law as both life and death, and you take which you will. At Calvary you have the law slaying the sinner, but life flowing from Christ, to wash the sin away. So in the midst of the throne is the slain Lamb, and the river of life proceeds from Him.

But He is the living stone, and the law which is the foundation of God’s throne is written upon Him. In receiving Him we drink of the Rock.

If Israel had believed this they would have had the law only in Christ, the living Stone, which sends forth fountains of water. They drank of the Rock, and the Rock was Christ. They drank not merely from the Rock, but of it, and we likewise must drink of the living Stone, only not faithlessly, as they did.

Water that is also Rock

Water is an emblem of instability:

Genesis 49

⁴ Unstable as water...

James 1

⁶ ...he that wavers is like a wave of the sea.

Yet rock, the emblem of strength, can by the power of God become water. In drinking the water, they drank of the Rock. The water which we think so unstable the Lord has made use of to establish the earth,

Psalm 24

² For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

The water of life is a solid rock foundation. Christ walked on the water just as one can on the solid rock.

This is coming to realities, and not forms. We drink of the Rock, Christ Jesus, and thus in Him receive the life of the law, the living law of liberty. He is made a quickening Spirit, and gives the water of life freely to every one who believes in Him. Coming by faith to the Lord Jesus and receiving the Spirit into our hearts, we receive the solid rock of God's eternal truth.

It is thus that we receive power to witness to the truth, for the throne in which is the slain Lamb from whom proceeds the river of life, has seven lamps of fire burning before it, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Remember this, that while for forty years Israel drank of the water that flowed from the rock in Horeb, which was turned into water, the rock was not diminished. Christ gives His life in an ever-flowing stream, yet He always has as much more to give.

Take Heed How You Hear

So you can take the law as moral or ceremonial, just as you will. Someone said to me,

“You do not in your teaching make any distinction between the law and the Gospel.”

Certainly not. The Gospel is the life of God’s living law, which is perfect, converting the soul. That was the only thing that God ever really gave to His people. But it depends on how we hear and how we see, whether we get life or death from it. There is nothing good that may not at the same time be ceremonial and formal, as well as spiritual; but not to the same person.

If we receive the law in Christ, every one of the commandments is a promise of God, that cleanses from sin. If we put a veil before our eyes we get nothing but death. Often we see how real the blood, the life, of Christ is, remembering that the Spirit and the water and the blood agree in one, it is easy to drink in the righteousness of God. If our hearts are cleansed so that we can see the stream of blood flowing, we can fill ourselves with His righteousness.

The woman who was dying from the loss of blood, came near to Christ, and established a connection with Him; she got into touch with Him, connected with the main stream, and so the blood of Christ, the water of life, flowed through her. We may have the pipes properly located in our houses, but if there is no connection with the main we get nothing. The woman’s life supply was nearly exhausted, and she came where all fulness dwells and made the connection by her faith, and received that which she lacked. Christ is the means of connection between heaven and earth.

“Oh,” you say, “if we had only lived in those days, and seen these wonderful miracles! What advantages the people then had, that we do not have.”

Not a bit of it. The blood is the life, and we have blood in our arteries and veins at this moment. Will that stay there uncorrupted day after day and year after year for ever? No; the whole body is undergoing change continually. Every moment, even every thought, destroys some of the matter of our bodies. The blood undergoes the most rapid change, and quick destruction. It is completely changed every few days. New blood must continually be supplied.

You can readily prove for yourselves that your blood does not continue. If you should eat nothing for a week, would you have as much blood as now? No; you would become weak and would show by the pallor of your cheeks that there was a lack of blood and nourishment. We live because we get fresh blood every day. There is a stream of blood flowing from the throne of God through every soul that lives, whether he knows it or not. The blood is constantly being used up, and continually being renewed.

“Oh, then, we make blood!”

No; God gives it to us in the air, light, and food, and it flows into us, and supplies our lack, and quickens us. Our bodies are supplied with life blood directly from the heart of Christ.

The reality of the cleansing accomplished by His blood is seen every day. Let the circulation stop, and there is poisoning and death. There must be continual circulation through us; and so the stream of life from God is flowing through us, and we are only little portions of the channel of life.

This shows us the reality of the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin by putting His own life of righteousness in us. He declares His righteousness for the sending away of sin. And so as God sends forth His life of righteousness, the blood of Christ, the stream flowing from the Rock, the living Stone, in which is the living law,—the law that gives life,—we receive the righteousness of the law as our daily life.

But even though it be coming into us, if we say we have not faith, we get only the form, which is death. How easy for us, if we would only believe it, to have the righteousness of God! Just as really as we can expand our lungs and have a draught of fresh air, just as we are refreshed from head to foot by a draught of water, so we can have the spiritual life come into us without any visible medium, and find ourselves refreshed.

Today the Spirit of Christ is hovering over the face of all creation, to put life into it. We should stop and think, God is here, and He puts life into me. In the morning we can think of Him who has been keeping the stream of life flowing through us all the night. Thus we may escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The curse is simply the wrong side of a blessing. The pillar that separated the Israelites from the Egyptians was light to Israel and darkness to the Egyptians; it was life to some and death to others. So the law is life or death to us, according to our relation to it.

If we transgress it,—go contrary to it,—it will cut us in pieces, grind us to powder and sweep us away.

But if we walk in it, it will be in us a well of water refreshing us day by day, and springing up into everlasting life.