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Communications.

Prayer, a reasonable Duty.

The obligation to perform this important duty, seems to grow out of the very relation in which a moral agent must necessarily stand to the Creator and Governor of the universe. It is, therefore, one of the earliest and highest duties incumbent on a dependent moral agent. Deny it; you annihilate dependence. There will then exist a moral being who *needs* nothing from God—who has no *want* to be supplied—who enjoys no bounty he would *wish* to be continued! Such a being must be independent!

The generic nature of prayer consists in a *sense of need, and desire of supply*. It has been invested with modifications of an adventitious character, arising out of particular emergencies. The attributes of prayer have been modified by the *fall*. It is essentially necessary to its acceptability, that it be in the *name of Christ*. This modification will, I conceive, continue through eternity. Confession of sins, is in the present state, a necessary concomitant of prayer. This will be unknown in the regions of glory. Thanksgiving unto God, for his *unspeakable gift*, and all the blessed results, now is, and will eternally continue, an ingredient of this *delightful duty*, so characteristic of the Christian.

If these premises be true, prayer will be a duty for ever incumbent

on, and for ever exercised by a saint in glory, as a necessary result of his moral dependence on the God who made him, and continues to be to him, the author of every good and of every perfect gift. A sense of need, and a desire for a supply, are perfectly compatible with our notions of a felicity competent to moral beings even of unsullied perfection. Had our first parents in the state of primeval innocence, never felt the painful sensation of hunger, they could never have experienced the pleasure arising from the gratification of this appetite. Indeed, in our present state, it is as hard to form an idea of *enjoyment*, without a previous sense of want, as to conceive a notion of a fine portrait, in which all were *light*, without one single *tinge of shade*! This principle is deeply inlaid in our constitution, and strongly evinced in the progressive development of the human character.

This idea, moreover, does perfectly coincide with that indefinite and progressive expansion of the human mind, which we are warranted to believe, will be going on in endless advances in perfection, in the mansions of glory. Now, in the order of nature, expansion must precede impletion, or the capacity must be enlarged, before there can be any void to be filled. But the very existence of a void will generate a sense of *want*. This sense of want, must of course be followed by a desire of enjoyment; and the very existence of this desire in a saint in

it is not thought so, by "him who judgeth righteously." He deems it a culpable evil; holds it in abhorrence; and often makes it the ruin of those who foster it. This he does too, in an unsuspected way. The victims of prejudice, by refusing to hear the truth plainly and pungently preached, and by pleasing themselves with a kind of instruction which excites no repugnance in their hearts, prevent themselves from being awakened out of spiritual slumber, and convinced of their enmity to God and holiness. They act as though they were afraid, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and healed. In this manner they accomplish the designs of Divine Wrath. They fall by their own hands; and go "in their own counsels" to eternal destruction.

The only safe policy, is to keep a candid and docile mind; a mind mainly desirous to know the truth, and pleased most, when the truth is most clearly disclosed. The most welcome method of exhibiting the truth, should be that, which holds it forth, in all its majestic simplicity, and independence on human opinion and feeling.

Finally; our subject admonishes us of the danger, of neglecting or slighting the Means of Grace. These Means we enjoy, in a pre-eminent degree. Like Capernaum, we are exalted to heaven, with respect to our advantages for securing salvation. Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things we see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things we hear, and have not heard them. But have not some of us cause to fear that it is with us, as it was with the multitude, whose heart had "waxed gross" under the ministry of Christ? May it not be true even of us, that seeing we see not, and hearing we hear not? Has not the world more attractions, in our view, than the cross of Christ and the truths of his gos-

pel? Have not our privileges been perverted by us, into instruments of stupidity and hardness of heart? Let us oblige our souls to answer these questions; and if the answer shall be affirmative, let us take the alarm, and hasten out of danger too tremendous, to be described or conceived.

T. H. S.

On Oaths; their lawfulness and abuse.

An oath is a declaration or promise, confirmed by an appeal to God for the truth of what is declared or promised. It is a religious rite, and ought not to be used but with solemnity, and on occasions of suitable importance. The inspired penman of the epistle to the Hebrews, remarks, (chap. vi. 16.) "that an oath, for confirmation, is to men an end of all strife." We learn, from this passage of scripture, what is the proper end and use of an oath: it is to terminate strife and elicit truth, in order to the distribution of justice, and the equitable settlement of disputes among mankind. And as the apostle refers to the use of oaths, for the purpose just stated, without any note of disapprobation, it is fair to conclude that he did not deem the usage anti-christian: this will be made evident, in the sequel, from his own practice.

In all ages, and among all nations, the oath has been, not only used, but used religiously, and considered of great importance to the welfare of human society. It seems, indeed, to be a branch of natural religion; and the writer of this article hopes to be able to demonstrate, that it is abundantly sanctioned by divine revelation, as well in the New Testament, as in the writings of Moses and the prophets.

It is known to every person who reads the Bible, that the Almighty himself often confirms his word by an oath. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;" Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

"I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear;" Isaiah xlv. 23. See also Jer. xii. 16, and a multitude of other passages, that might be cited. Now the design of God's using oaths was, manifestly, to secure the faith and obedience of his people, and to afford them strong consolation, by giving them the most positive assurance of his faithfulness and truth. But this implies that men had an understanding of the nature, lawfulness, and obligation of an oath; otherwise it would not be likely to have the intended effect.

It is well known also, that holy men, under the special guidance of Providence, were in the habit of using solemn oaths, when occasion required, even *before the giving of the law, at Mount Sinai*. Thus, Abraham sware to Abimelech, (Gen. xxi. 24,) and administered an oath to his servant. Gen. xxiv. 3—9. So Jacob sware with Laban, (Gen. xxxi. 52,) and Joseph to his father. (Gen. xlvii. 31.) In these, and many similar instances, the oath was used religiously, and under the divine sanction; which shows that the practice was accordant with the immutable principles of morality.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, oaths were required of the people on frequent occasions, as a part of their duty to one another, and to their heavenly King. Thus, the Lord made his people enter into an "oath to serve him, and to keep his covenant." Deut. xxix. 12, 14. King Asa made all "Judah swear that they would seek the Lord with all their hearts." 2 Chron. xv. 14. Nehemiah called the priests, and "took an oath of them, to do according to their promise," (Neh. v. 12); and he, moreover, engaged the nobles and people to "enter into an oath that they would walk in God's law, and do his commandments;" chap. x. 29. And are not Christians call-

ed upon, in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, to bind themselves *sacramentally*, i. e. with an implied oath, to Christ and to the careful observance of his precepts?

Yet some persons refuse to take an oath, on any occasion, alleging, as the ground of their scruples, two passages in the New Testament, viz.: Matt. v. 33—37, and James v. 12. The latter of these texts is taken from the former; and the design of the apostle, evidently is, to guard Christians against making rash vows or promises, in seasons of peculiar affliction. We shall confine our observations, therefore, to what our Saviour says on the subject. Let us keep the whole passage in our eye, and attend carefully to its scope, connexion, and bearing: it forms a part of what is called his Sermon on the Mount; and is as follows: "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head; because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

The learned Dr. John Owen, in his admirable "Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews," remarks, "That all things prohibited by our Saviour, in this sermon to the Jews, were in themselves, and by virtue of the law of God, *antecedently unlawful*. Our Saviour rends the veil of their pharisaical hypocrisy, discovers the corruptions of their traditions and interpretations of the law, declares the true nature of sin, and in sundry instances, shows how, by these false glosses, the body of the people had been drawn into soul-ruining sins; whereby he restored

the law, so to speak, to its pristine glory. Let any one of the particulars mentioned by our Saviour be considered, and it will be found, that it was before *unlawful in itself*, or declared so in the *positive law of God.*"

This observation, we believe is just and weighty. Let us apply the principle which it embodies, to the case now before us. We have seen that oaths were in use before the giving of the law; that Jehovah himself employed them, and required his people to swear on sundry occasions; we have seen, that the moral law *sanctioned* the use of them, as means of maintaining truth, and of binding men to the faithful discharge of duty. We are not to suppose, therefore, that when Christ says "Swear not at all," he intends to forbid the proper use of judicial oaths, or religious vows; for "he came, as he solemnly affirms, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it," and establish its sanctity. What sort of swearing then did he mean to prohibit? We answer; *all swearing in our "communication," or ordinary conversation and intercourse with one another; especially,* such as was countenanced by the frivolous distinctions of the Pharisees, and other uninspired expounders of the law. These "blind leaders of the blind," taught the people that they might swear by the Almighty as often as they pleased, provided they complied with their oaths. They taught, also, that if men swore by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or their own heads, such oaths were not binding. This was a manifest violation of the third commandment; and, in this way, it is extensively and shockingly violated still, and that too, by many who have been better taught, than were the disciples of the Pharisees. Mark, how our *Divine Teacher from Heaven* reproves these miserable expositors, and unveils their silly glosses, in the *xxiii*d chap. of *Matt.* 16—22.

"Woe unto you, ye blind guides! who say, ~~whosoever~~ shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the *gold* of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind! for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso, therefore, shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon: and whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein: and he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon."

If our Lord meant to prohibit all swearing, in all possible cases, we think, (and we desire to say it *reverently*, for sake of the argument,) he violated his own precept; which no Christian can admit. In the *viii.* 12. of the gospel by Mark, we find this expression, used by him, in reference to a presumptuous demand of the Pharisees, of a sign from heaven, to demonstrate his Messiahship: "Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation." By a more literal translation the passage would read, *Verily I say unto you, if a sign shall be given to this generation: which, as that eminent critic, Dr. Daniel Whitby remarks, is a Hebrew form of swearing, and imports thus much: "Let God punish me, or let me not live, if a sign be given to this generation."* The words are exactly parallel to several other expressions in scripture, which are expressly called oaths, and may be fairly regarded as a form of swearing. In the *xxv*th chap. of *Matt.* 63d verse, we are informed that the high priest addressed our Lord thus: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God." This

was the form used at that time, in putting men on oath; and criminals and witnesses were required to answer, as in the presence of God. It is perfectly plain, therefore, that our Lord here answered upon oath; which he certainly would not have done, had he, in his discourse on the mount, intended to forbid swearing in a judicial and solemn manner. If the use of the oath was to be entirely discontinued, under the gospel dispensation, why did the Redeemer countenance its continuance by his own practice? And why did the angel, in the Apocalypse, x. 5 and 6. "lift his hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever?" Why did the primitive Christians make no scruple on the subject? And why does the apostle Paul so frequently make use of expressions which are undeniably equivalent to oaths? Take a few instances; and let it be remembered that Paul is the amanuensis of the Holy Spirit: "God is my witness, that without ceasing, I make mention of you in my prayers;" Rom. i. 9. "New the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not;" Gal. i. 20. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knoweth that I lie not;" 2 Cor. xi. 31. "I call God to record upon my soul, that to spare you, I came not yet to Corinth;" 2 Cor. i. 23. "God is my record, how greatly I long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ;" Phil. i. 8. "Now," says the learned Whitby, "these examples prove that blessed Paul and that good Spirit by which he was directed thus to write did not conceive all swearing to be forbidden by our Saviour's words; but that it was still lawful, when the matter was of great importance to the welfare of the souls of men, and could not be confirmed any other way, to seal it with a voluntary oath. Now, undoubtedly St. Paul well understood the mind of Christ, in this, his prohibition; and, therefore, had he conceived it so universal, as

some contend it is, he would not have encouraged others by his example to transgress it."

Christians are warranted in the use of oaths, then, provided they use them lawfully; i. e. when regularly called upon by ecclesiastical or civil authority to give testimony, for the maintenance of truth and justice, and for the terminating of strife. The manner of taking an oath, has been various in different periods and nations of the world. The kissing of the Bible, requiring the witness to swear upon the holy evangelists, and the admission of simple affirmations, instead of an oath, are usages which we cannot approve of. We would prefer, in every instance, the *lifting up of the hand, with a direct appeal to the omniscient Searcher of hearts*. The oath is an awful solemnity, and it ought never to be resorted to lightly or needlessly. The two most common abuses of this divine rite, are *perjury* and *profaneness*. These, indeed, are nearly allied. The man, who swears *falsely*, imprecates upon his soul the infinite and insupportable displeasure of the Almighty God: and he who swears in common conversation cannot fail to perjure himself. What foolhardiness,—what infatuated temerity,—what a gross outrage upon the laws of decency and religion, for an intelligent and accountable creature to invoke his Maker to attest his hard speeches, his ribaldry, or his nonsense!

We close our remarks, on this subject, by subjoining a solemn admonition to profane swearers, from the pen of the late Dr. Dwight, president of Yale College, (Con.)

"You, unhappily for yourselves, are those who take the name of God in vain; and, of course, are now, or soon will be subjects of all the guilt and danger, which I have specified. *Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, consider your ways*. Remember what you are doing; against whom your evil tongues

are directed; who is the object of your contempt and mockery. Ask yourselves what you gain; what you expect to gain; what you do not lose. Remember that you lose your reputation, at least in the minds of all the wise and good, and all the blessings of their company and friendship; that you sacrifice your peace of mind; that you break down all those principles on which virtue may be grafted, and with them, every rational hope of eternal life; that you are rapidly becoming more and more corrupted, day by day; and that, with this deplorable character, you are preparing to go to judgment. Think what it will be to swear and curse, to mock God and insult your Redeemer, through life; to carry your oaths and curses to a dying bed; to enter eternity with blasphemies in your mouths; and to stand before the final bar, when the last sound of profaneness has scarcely died upon your tongues." "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, who taketh his name in vain." W. N.



On the Duration of Future Punishment.

(Continued from p. 21.)

We now proceed to the *second* inquiry, viz. whether the *extinction* of *penal evil*, or, the *termination* of *future punishment*, can ever result from a *vicarious atonement*.

It is cordially admitted, that a vicarious atonement has been made. "The law has been magnified and made honourable." Jesus "has brought in an everlasting righteousness." A righteousness completely adequate to all the demands of law and justice, commanding the admiration of the universe, has been exhibited to the contemplation of created intelligences. The angels desire to pry into its mysterious origin. A righteousness, on

the footing of which God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly who believe on his Son, has been presented, in such circumstances, as to even solicit and urge its acceptance by sinners, as the foundation of their eternal felicity. The inquiry then, is not about the existence of an atonement adequate to all the purposes for which it was designed. That has been admitted. But the question is, was it designed for *all*, or only for *some* of the rebels against JEHOVAH? A correct answer to this inquiry, will be decisive on the point at issue. We admit, without any hesitation, that if the atonement made by our Lord, embraced every sinner, by it, every sinner, either has been, or will be infallibly saved. The debt, in that case, has been paid. Justice has been satisfied. It has no farther demands against the sinner. All his sufferings are disciplinary and medicinal. Justice would blush at his enduring, either here, or hereafter, the smallest evil of a punitive or penal nature. This would be equivalent to the demand of double payment of the same debt. But, if Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; if himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin might live unto righteousness, and be healed by his stripes," it would be the most flagrant injustice to distrain the insolvent, for the debt already paid by the surety! "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"—Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!

But as the scriptures do not authorize us to believe that the vicarious atonement of the Redeemer embraced every individual of the human race, much less fallen angels, I shall proceed to demonstrate the *particularity* of redemption; or show that Jesus Christ died for a *select* number, and not for the *whole* of mankind. However ungracious this doctrine may ap-