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DO ALL AS UNTO THE LORD

– ISAIAH 5:11-23. – *NOVEMBER 25*. –

Golden Text: – "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." – 1 Cor. 9:27.

THIS DATE has been set aside as the "World's Temperance Sunday," and the S.S. Lesson has been selected in accord with this. The consecrated of the Lord's people are not to be supposed to need special warnings or reproofs along this line. They have left the world behind, turned their backs upon sin and its various snares, and begun a life of consecration to the Lord – to them "old things have passed away, all things have become new." For such to turn again to the ways of sin and the gratification of the flesh, the Apostle says (2 Pet. 2:22), would be like the sow turning to wallowing in the mire after having been washed. Nevertheless the general weakness and frailty of our fallen human nature, and the fact that we are surrounded by temptations, make it necessary that the New [R3892 : page 360] Creature in Christ should continually watch as well as pray lest he enter into temptation. None achieve such strength of character nor attain to such heights of spiritual development as would permit them to glory in the flesh or insure them against ever yielding to its seductive influences. Hence it is, the Apostle assures us, that when we realize our weakness and our dependence upon the Lord for grace to help in every time of need, then we are really strong; whereas when we feel strong, sufficient of ourselves, self-confident, we are really in danger.

THEREFORE GONE INTO CAPTIVITY

Isaiah's prophecy was written after the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel had gone into captivity to the Assyrians, and in this lesson he seems to imply that in connection with the idolatries which

were the direct cause of the nation's overthrow as elsewhere stated, intemperance was associated. But although he uses most direct language on the subject we are still not sure that the drunkenness referred to was not symbolical, figurative, representing intoxication with the spirit of the Adversary, the spirit of self-indulgence, the spirit of licentiousness, the spirit of wilfulness and alienation from God. We do know that in other parts of Isaiah's prophecy drunkenness is thus used figuratively, and we do know the same of other Scriptures, as, for instance, when we are told that Great Babylon made all the nations of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication, and again it is declared that the world is drunk with the wine of the wrath of God just before the great climacteric trouble, which will be the consummation of the present age and the introduction of the new dispensation.

Isaiah was not writing to the people who had been injured – to the people of the ten tribes, but to the Israelites of the two tribes. He was seeking to warn them by the experiences of their sister nation. In a parable he pictured a garden of the Lord kept with diligent care by the great Husbandman, which should have brought forth good grapes and good wine, but which instead brought forth evil grapes and a generally evil, poisonous influence. And it is upon this pedestal or basis that our lesson is set up, warning the Jews who were still under divine favor against making a similar mistake. However, whether we apply the Prophet's words to the figurative wine and strong drink or to the literal, we have lessons in both which are surely very profitable to all of the Lord's people. We need to fortify our minds, not only against strong drink of false doctrines and error, but against every intoxicating influence. In our poor fallen state none of us have any too much sense, and we need to conserve all that we have, and of the Lord's grace to receive more and more of his Spirit, which the Apostle describes as "the spirit of a sound mind." In

this connection we quote the wise words of Professor George Adam Smith: –

"No one who has had to do with persons slowly falling from moderate to immoderate drinking can mistake Isaiah's meaning when he says, 'They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.' Nothing kills the conscience like steady drinking to a little excess; and religion, even while the conscience is still alive, acts on it only as an opiate....With fatal persistence the luxury of every civilization has taken to drink; and of all the indictments brought by moralists against nations, that which they reserve for drunkenness is, as here, most heavily weighed. The crusade against drink is not the novel thing that many imagine who only observe its late revival amongst ourselves. In ancient times there was scarcely a State in which prohibitive legislation of the most stringent kind was not attempted, and generally carried out with a thoroughness more possible under despots than where, as with us, the slow consent of public opinion is necessary. A horror of strong drink has in every age possessed those who from their position as magistrates or prophets have been able to follow for any distance the drifts of social life. Isaiah exposes as powerfully as ever any of them did in what the peculiar fatality of drinking lies. Wine is a mocker by nothing more than by the moral incredulity which it produces, [R3893 : page 360] enabling men to hide from themselves the spiritual and material effects of over-indulgence in it."

In our lesson the Prophet represents those who are enslaved to strong drink, saying, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, until wine inflame them." That which at first was a matter for the will to decide becomes very speedily a fixed habit, which controls the will and brings it into slavery, rendering it almost powerless. To the slaves of liquor or other intoxicants, such as


tobacco, opium, morphine, etc., the voice of their tyrant master is heard when they awaken – their nerves cry out for the opiate; it is not with them as with those who are fully consecrated to the Lord and have him as their Master. To the latter the thought is and should be thankfulness to the Lord for blessings received, and petitions to him for wisdom and grace to render service in his cause for the day beginning. The Apostle declares that it is not so much whose servants we claim to be, but "his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death or obedience unto righteousness." (Rom. 6:16.) If we are serving sin, serving the flesh, we are slaves to it; but if Christ has made us free in heart it is for the new mind to claim the divine promise, and to exalt itself in the ways of righteousness and to gain repeated victories over the weaknesses and besetments of the flesh.

EVERY GOOD THING PERVERTED

While under slavery to sin there is a disposition to turn all the good things of life into the service of the perverted appetites, and so our lesson sets forth that the harp, the flute, the tabret, good in themselves, become improperly associated with the wine of revelry. Then the result is stated, "They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." How true this is: sin in its various forms blinding, influencing, the mind and heart are attracted away from the most worthy subjects of consideration. The Prophet David tells how he praised the Lord early in the morning, and in the night-watches called to mind his goodness, but contrariwise declared of those given up to self-indulgence and enslaved to sin, "God is not in all their thoughts." (Psa. 10:4.) Their minds are distracted, turned to unworthy and ignoble subjects, that have more and more a degrading influence upon them. In a word, the general tendency of sin, which abounds in the **[R3893 : page 361]** world through the fall, is downward, but God has set before us in his Word higher and nobler and better standards. Wise are those who, hearing the voice divine, seek to

follow it; foolish are those who, knowing the downward tendency of sin, pursue it.

CAPTIVES IN HELL

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge: and their honorable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure, and their glory and their multitude and their pomp and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it; and the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled." 

We cannot hope that even the most abstemious living on the part of the most godly of mankind would deliver any from the divine sentence, "Dying thou shalt die," which, the Apostle declares, "passed upon all men through one man's disobedience." As a result of that sentence Adam himself went down to sheol, into the tomb, into the state of death (the "hell" of the above quotation). We can, however, fearlessly assert that the ignoring of the divine Law, the disposition to gratification of the fallen flesh, has greatly enlarged hell, sheol, the tomb. That is to say, that many more die prematurely than otherwise would. Because of this slavery to sin and appetite our race is greatly weakened mentally, morally and physically – hence the death of so many of the weaklings of our race in infancy and the general captivity of all, for, as the Apostle declares, "Sin and Death reign," and the world are their subjects, their slaves. Thank God the Apostle points out a coming day when the groaning creation, slaves to sin, will be delivered from this bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The opportunity for deliverance will be within their reach, yea, thrust upon them by the blessed conditions of the Millennial age, so that only by a

wilful, persistent resistance of God's gracious purposes will any of them be remanded to the Second Death as incorrigible.

Our lesson points out that this enslaving and degrading influence takes hold upon all the mighty and the great as well as the mean and the little, but eventually out of all this miserable failure on man's part the Lord shall get glory and honor. In due time his gracious plan will so outwork as to bring in righteousness, and cause it to predominate and rule the world, even as Sin and Death are now ruling. Thank God that the great Redeemer who has purchased the world with his own precious blood is shortly to be the King of earth, Immanuel, God with men, and that one of his first works in connection with the establishment of his Kingdom will be the binding of Satan, the restraining of the power of Sin and Death and the setting free of all their captives, as it is written, the prison-doors shall be opened and the captives shall be liberated. – Isa. 61:1.

The people of Israel had been favored of God greatly in a covenant made with them through Moses, and in the consequent blessings which had attended them through the Lord's general supervision of their affairs; and since they rebelled against all these, and degraded themselves after the manner of the heathen, they merited special judgments and received them. Their captivity was a part of these, and, as our lesson declares, their favored land was permitted to fall into the hands of strangers. Yea, the goodly portion, even the spiritual favors, were many of them bestowed upon us who were by nature Gentiles, aliens, strangers and foreigners from the commonwealth of Israel. – Eph. 2:12.

SLAVES OF VANITY AND SIN

When we read, "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope," we should

not understand the word "woe" as a threat of future tribulation: rather we may consider it as an expression of sympathy. Woeful is the lot of those who are enslaved to a wrong course through vanity. Pride is really controlling a large proportion of the human family, conscience is violated because of pride, iniquities of various kinds are often unwillingly dragged along on this account. The poor groaning creation is as a slave bound to sin by a "cart rope"; it is so strong that he cannot break it even if he did realize its galling nature. On the contrary, blind to the real source of his troubles, the sinner often rejoices and seeks pleasure in his slavery, and knows not that the only one from whom it is possible for liberty to be secured is the Almighty God, who has appointed the Redeemer to set us free, and whose word is, "If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed." – John 8:36.

This class of deluded ones, tied with cords of vanity and enslaved to sin with a cart-rope, are inclined to doubt the holy one of Israel – to say within themselves, "If there be a God, and if he have the power, would he not long ago have exerted it? May we not, therefore, go onward in the way of sin with impunity?" As the Prophet expresses it, they say, "Let him [God] make speed and hasten his work that we may see it, and let the counsel of the holy one of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it." Today we are living in just such a time. The fact that the Lord has been lifting the vail of ignorance from the world, and permitting mankind greater blessings and greater enlightenment than ever before, is influencing many of those who are drinking the wine of Babylon to deny the Word of God and the plan of God therein set forth – to deny that man was created in the divine image, that he fell, that he needed to be redeemed, that it is God's intention to restore him, and that for the purpose of this restoration God has promised the Millennial Kingdom, and that the divine purpose in this Gospel age has been the selection of the Church, to be joint-heirs with Christ in that work of human uplift. As the Apostle has expressed it, they are inclined to say, "Where is the promise of

his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (2 Pet. 3:4.) They have turned their minds in the direction of evolution, and conclude that man did not fall from the divine image, but that he has been progressing for now six thousand years from the image of a monkey, gradually attaining to perfection. They incline to say the world is just what we make it; they incline to ignore the Scriptural promise that there is a coming time of rectification or judgment as respects all the affairs of the world, and that in that thousand-year day of judgment all the **[R3894 : page 362]** iniquities of the present time shall be rectified, every good endeavor rewarded, every wilful misdeed receive its just punishment, and all mankind have a glorious opportunity of rising up under the stripes and disciplines and rewards of that glorious time to the recovery, if they will, of all that was lost in Adam.

THEY THAT CALL EVIL GOOD

These same people are disposed to consider the evils of our time as nothing, as really good in comparison with the past, and the good of the past they are disposed to reckon as evil, imperfect. The Doctors of Divinity and professors of our day are esteemed to be the highest standards of knowledge and authority that the world has ever seen, while correspondingly the Lord, the apostles and the prophets of the past are esteemed to have been unwise, foolish, ignorant, unable to discern each other's falsities as the Higher Critics of our day discern them. Do not these, as the Apostle declares, call evil good and good evil? do they not put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter? Are they not "wise in their own eyes, prudent in their own sight"? Are they not "mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink" – strong doctrine – wonderful philosophies?

GUIDED BY POLICY, NOT BY TRUTH

The final arraignment of the lesson is that the class under criticism "justify the wicked for a reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him." That is to say, the spirit of "graft" is here recognized – it is a matter of policy. Many today can be found ready to compromise as respects their condemnation of iniquities if there is some reward and advantage or gift for themselves in connection with the matter, or if they believe that some general purposes favorable to themselves would be served thereby. Likewise is there not a growing spirit of disregard for the reputation of the righteous, so that many are not only indifferent on this subject, but would be willing to misrepresent or vilify those in the right if it would be profitable to them so to do? We cannot avoid the thought that this self-seeking disposition is growingly manifest everywhere – perhaps nowhere more so than amongst the clergy of Christendom. Many of them, we have every reason to believe, clearly recognize the weakness of the erroneous positions with which they are associated, and recognize to a considerable degree the strength of the Truth. Nevertheless the majority of them seem to be ready to justify, to defend, the wicked, the erroneous, the God-dishonoring creeds for a reward – for their standing in their denominations, for the honor of men, for the dignity and financial emoluments connected therewith. And for the same considerations many are willing to denounce and misrepresent as in error those whom they know to be the defenders of the truth, of righteousness. What says the Prophet of these? He says: – "Woe unto them!" And the "woe" time is very near at hand. It will be that great time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation, which shall engulf the great, the wise, the mighty, the learned, the chief captains, financial, social and religious, in the great catastrophe of anarchy. Thank God for the glorious prospect which we see in his Word – that

just behind the clouds of trouble which surround our lonely way the Sun of Righteousness is arising with healing in his beams for the blessing of all the families of the earth, according to the Abrahamic Covenant.

OUR GOLDEN TEXT

The lesson for us all as the Lord's followers is well expressed in our Golden Text, which holds before us the Apostle's example, that we should be followers of him as he was a follower of the Lord and of his instructions. Let us, therefore, each and all, strive earnestly that we may be able to faithfully apply to ourselves the words of the Apostle, "I keep my body under and bring it into subjection, lest having preached to others I myself should be a castaway" – a castaway from the high calling with which we have been favored – losers of the great blessing and privilege of joint-heirship in the Kingdom with our Lord. Could we but keep ever before our minds the thought that we are on trial now, being tested, that we are being given opportunity to prove the sincerity and depth of our consecration to the Lord and to righteousness, the effect would surely be to spur us and energize us in the ways of the Lord. Let us remember, then, that this keeping under of the body appertains to our food as well as to our drink, to our thoughts as well as to our speech. Indeed all the difficulties with which we are obliged to contend begin in our thoughts, and by these, therefore, is the New Creature properly and justly measured by the Lord, who judges us not according to the imperfections of the flesh, which we have inherited, but according to our new spirits, our new minds, our new intentions, our new wills, our new hearts, and the energy and activity which these put forth in the keeping of the mortal body in subjection to the spirit, and so far as possible to the letter of the divine requirement.

"WE CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST THE TRUTH"

Whoever intelligently, wilfully, heartily does anything against the truth, against that which is right, is in serious danger of losing his relationship to the Lord – in serious danger of extinguishing the spark of the new nature with which he had been begotten of the holy Spirit. The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of obedience to the Father and to all righteousness, and whoever loses this Spirit so that he will intentionally oppose the Lord and righteousness, seemingly comes under the head of those mentioned by the Apostle when he says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." – Rom. 8:9.

This principle may be widely applied, but for the moment we narrow it down to the special topic of our lesson, intemperance, and suggest that from our standpoint the Lord's people should all be found on the side of temperance and in opposition to intemperance. Even when apparently there will be no hope of enforcing a prohibition law, we do not see how the Lord's faithful could conscientiously endorse the licensing a recognized evil. "We can do nothing against the truth." We must not be of those who say, Let us do evil that good may follow. We do not need to judge those who differ from us as to their conceptions of duty, but we suggest that each one who is the Lord's has a personal responsibility and should view it from this standpoint. We have no hope of the world's reformation along the lines of prohibition, but this does not hinder us from expressing **[R3894 : page 363]** our sympathy for the right, which we are sure will prevail as soon as our Lord's prayer is fulfilled that God's Kingdom shall come and his will be done on earth as in heaven. It is our duty to help lift up the standard for the people, even though that be a standard which they will not accept nor be greatly profited by until the Kingdom enforce it. In line with this we suggest that if the Lord's people at any time in any place be confronted with the question of license or no license they would

do well to exercise their liberties and privileges in voting against the license – even though they may doubt the value of their vote and even though they might be sure that it would bring upon them more or less of odium and ill will on the part of those who are ready to rob the righteous of their righteousness for a reward and consideration.

We quote the following from the public prints without being able to verify its truthfulness. The lesson is true, whether the incident is so or not. The item follows: –

THE DECIDING TESTIMONY

"I have read of a town meeting in Pennsylvania where this question of license was to be decided. As the question was about to be put there arose from one corner of the room a miserable female, wrinkled and gaunt, and stretching out her arms, in a shrill voice she cried: 'Look upon me. You all know me, or once did. You all know that I was once mistress of the best farm in town. You all know, too, I had one of the best – the most devoted of husbands. You all know I had five noble-hearted, industrious boys. Where are they now? Doctor, where are they now? You all know. You all know they lie in a row, side by side, in yonder churchyard; all – every one of them *filling a drunkard's grave!*'

"They were all taught to believe that temperate drinking was safe – excess alone ought to be avoided; and they never acknowledged excess. They quoted *you*, and *you*, and *you* [pointing with her shred of a forefinger to him who said that alcohol was a good creature of God, to him that sold the poison, to him that gave it as a medicine, for a little was good]. They thought themselves safe under such teachers. But I saw the gradual change coming over my family and prospects with dismay and horror: I felt that we were all to be overwhelmed in one common ruin. I tried to ward off the blow, I tried to break the

spell – the delusive spell – in which the idea of the benefits of temperate drinking had involved my husband and sons.

"I begged, I prayed; but the odds were against me. My poor husband and my dear boys fell into the snare, and they could not escape; and one after another were conveyed to the sorrowful grave of the drunkard. Now look at me again. You probably see me for the last time – my sand has almost run. I have dragged my exhausted frame from my present home – *your poorhouse* – to warn you *all* – to warn you who taught, you who sold, you who gave;' and with her arms high flung, and her tall form stretched to the utmost, and her voice raised to an unearthly pitch – she exclaimed: 'I shall soon stand before the judgment seat of God. I shall meet you there, you false guides, and be a witness against you all.'

"She spoke and vanished. But when the chairman put the question, 'Shall any license be granted for the sale of spirituous liquors?' the response was the unanimous, '*No!*'"
