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Studies in the Book of Hebrews – No.7

with him, patiently strives with him, to win him back to obedience. If every one of us could accept of this thought, that God is in us and ever seeking to lead us in that way which is wisest and best for us, how eagerly would we seek to know God's way for us—to understand all the laws which he has established for our well-being. Would we not cease to consider it a duty to obey God, and rather regard it as the highest privilege; since by submitting man's will to God, and co-operating with the divine power at work within him, this power will ever lead him to always care for his will, protect it, and will make him the happiest, the truest, the noblest, the most god-like man?

Studies in the Book of Hebrews.—No. 7.

E. J. WAGGONER.

(Tuesday Afternoon, Feb. 16, 1897.)

THIS question was handed to me as I came in: "In Rom. 13:1 ('There is no power but of God'), does the word 'power' have the same signification as in other places?" I do not know why it should mean anything different in one place than it does in another. Power is power, and power belongs to God, and there is no other source of power. It does not seem as though it ought to be difficult for people who believe in God to believe that. Power, without any qualification or limitation, belongs to God, that is, it pertains to him; it is his attribute. Suppose we take it that God has power, but he has not all the power there is. If that were so, there would be another God, would there not?

(A voice) That would make it necessary.

Suppose we say he has some power in the universe, and that there is another being in the universe who has some power. Then the question will be, Which is the greater? There will be a controversy in the universe. Now just such a controversy has arisen—Satan has claimed equality with God, and has presumed to dispute the possession of power. But I thank God there is no question about the outcome, or about the facts. Power belongs to God, and therefore we do not need to wait until the end to find out who is going to come out ahead, in order to arrange ourselves on his side. But we know from the Bible and from the Word of God in all nature, that power, absolute and universal, all the power there is, be-

longs to God. Don't you see that if it were not so, there would be some part of the universe over which God did not have any right to control.

(A voice) Yes.

And if we could find out who those certain ones are that have power that does not belong to God, we would not have any ground whatever to stand on in preaching the gospel to them. They would say, I never received anything from the Lord, and I do not owe him anything.

Do you not see that the question of division of power is simply the question, How many gods are there? There is one God, and only one.

Well it is wonderful to me, every day I live, and the longer I live the more wonderful it is to me, into how small a space, and how simple a truth, all the truth is resolved. Whoever comes to the recognition of this fact, and holds himself to it as all the truth there is in the universe,—God is, and there is no other; and when we see God is, he that cometh to God must believe that he is. That is his name.—I Am. What?—I Am, absolute. When we come face to face with that, it is a wonderful thought. God is. Where?—He is. Go where you will in the universe, and there it can be said, He is. You know it says in the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm:—

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there [that is about the only space that some people believe that he has]; and if I make my bed in hell, [that is in the depths, the heart of the earth,] behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

Why should any one try to minimize the power of God, or to claim that the power is divided between him and another being? Do you not see that in so doing a man is taking the foundation from under his own feet? What confidence can we have in God if he is not the only supreme, absolute, the only God, the only ruler in the universe? If any one can claim power aside or apart from God, we have no hope.

There is one being who has thought to divide divine honors with the Lord. He has said, "I will be like the Most High," and he has instilled that spirit into mankind from the very beginning, saying, In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be like God. I believe that was why our first parents cut loose from God. They thought that they could get along without him, therefore they did

not need to obey him. It is all involved in that; Satan said, I have power outside of God, I am independent of him. Satan made them believe that God was arbitrary, and was trying to keep them from heaven, so that they would not know, and so he could arrogate all honors to himself. Then they ate so that they might get the power that God had been keeping back from them. But they failed, for power belongs only to God. When they put forth their hand to take that which was to give them power to make them like God, thinking that they could maintain their existence independent of him, in that very day came death. Then they found that there was no power but God, and that the devil had lied to them.

Now, God in his mercy and long-suffering allowed his power to be prostituted, allowed men to use his power, even against him. Why?—Because he is merciful and loving, sending his rain on the evil and the good; his sunshine on the just and the unjust, in order that the goodness of God might reveal the truth, the power that belongs to God.

That lesson that we came to study yesterday in the second chapter of Hebrews, is so important that we must spend time upon that, studying the Scriptures and showing how plainly it is revealed, that God is in Christ, in everything, because God is manifest only in Christ.

And so it makes no difference which term we use in speaking, God, or Christ, it is that power, because Christ is the power and the wisdom of God. Wherever Christ is, there is the power of God. Wherever the power of God is, there is Christ.

So that we may see that we are not wandering from this study in Hebrews, we will read, beginning with these verses:—

But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death,

that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels

He goes right back to the beginning. Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come; therefore, since Christ's sacrifice has, so far as we are concerned, to do with this world, he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham:—

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

What we read yesterday in the tenth chapter of Romans, we will look at again. "The righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down.)" That is, Christ came down voluntarily. He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. "Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)" Or, when the gospel is preached through Christ; the word can be said to every soul, Now you do not need to say, Where will I find him? This is just where perhaps nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of the preaching of the gospel does not reach the people,—because it fails to make the connection between God and the people. Yes, believe on the Lord. But, what? Where is he? Where may I find the Lord? How can I know about Christ crucified and risen? It does not say that. The Word is Christ. Now do not say, Who came to bring the Word to us, or Christ to us, in order that we might be made righteous to keep the law. No; what saith it?—The Word is in them. It is in thy mouth. Or, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, literally.

What is the word of faith which we preach?—"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Now, what is the great fact, the great truth, about the Lord Jesus that is to be confessed with the mouth? Why, that the Word was made flesh—that is the thing to be confessed, Confess the Lord Jesus. Why confess Christ?—Because to confess a thing is to say it is so. To confess the Lord Jesus in the flesh, is to confess that Christ is the power of God; and that is to confess that this is not of men at all. This life I have is not my life. It is God's.

It is God's in the most absolute sense. The breath of God, and the Word—these are even in thy mouth. It is the manifestation of God's power. Then when a man confesses that, he simply gives up, he renounces all his assumptions to power, and of right to rule; all ownership of himself that he has claimed to have, he gives up, and he is the Lord's because this life is the life that God has given. It is the breath that God has lent. I am living upon his bounty; not only so, but it is his life within.

Knowing that fact—that Christ, the Lord, the power of God, is in my flesh—now I will believe in my heart that God has raised him from the dead; that is, gives him the victory over the infirmity of the flesh, even over death. Then I have Christ crucified and risen again in the flesh, and when I believe in that Christ risen to the right hand of God, that lifts me up so long as I believe. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.

Here is a message to God's people; and when you read this you will see that it is not by chance that we are taking up these things to-day.

Let us turn to the fortieth chapter of Isaiah :—

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Verses 3-5.

Now, what is this voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord."—The voice was that of John the Baptist. (See John 1: 19-23.)

But did John the Baptist finish the message?—No. Read further:—

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand forever. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. Verses 5-10.

In the last chapter of the Bible we read: "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." But

here it reads, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Then the work of John the Baptist was to prepare for the second coming of Christ; as well as for the first. And that message is to be given to-day. He is to come and rule with a strong arm; "and his work [is] before him." That is the last message. It must be. The last message is the Lord's coming, and his coming is near. We often speak of the third angel's message going with power, or with a loud voice, "the loud cry." What have we here?—"Lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." Then this is the loud cry of the third angel's message. This is what we have here in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah. It is the last message going with a loud cry, saying, "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God." Where? says one. I cannot see him; where is he? Get your eyes open then. That is the last message, Behold your God. Where?—In the things which he has made. Now, this is an essential part of the message. We have seen where it points to—the end. That is the Lord's coming with power, and it is the message proclaimed with a mighty voice. What shall I cry? What message shall I give?—"All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

What is the message, then,—the last message to be given to the people?—Behold your God; the mighty one. All flesh is grass, but the Word of the Lord abides. In short, man himself is nothing; God is everything. Now take this simple statement: "All flesh is grass." Is that true? We try sometimes to evade that, saying, All flesh is like grass. But "all flesh is grass."

Take the first chapter in Genesis. We have not half begun to learn that chapter. If we knew the first chapter of Genesis thoroughly, there would not be much of the Bible that we could not see through clearly. Let us read in three different places here in this chapter. First, the eleventh verse:—

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

From where does the grass come then?—Out of the earth. He said, Let the earth bring it forth, and the earth obeyed. The earth had no power

of itself to bring forth grass, but when he put his Word into it, then the grass came; and so it is that grass still grows. The Word abides forever; it still says, Bring forth grass, and the grass grows by the power of that Word. The twenty-fourth verse:—

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

The same thing, just the same thing that was said of the grass. Let the earth bring forth the grass, now let the earth bring forth the beast. Grass and beast came from the same place. "And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground." Grass, beast, man, comes from the earth. Man, just like others, is grass. All flesh is grass; it grows out of the ground—by what power?—The power of God. By that power we live. All are of dust, and all return to dust again. Then there is not so much difference between the grass of the field and us. Christ said, "Consider the lilies of the field;" but, there is another lily, for "Israel shall grow as the lily."

Where does man get his support? Where does his life come from? Where does man get his food? There is not anything that man eats that does not come from the ground. The beasts of the field eat the herbs. All flesh is grass. There are many forms of grass, not only the grass we tread upon, but the wheat is one form of grass; herbs are only different forms of grass, and God has given them to man to eat. The trees are of the same nature as grass, so we have creation all as grass; but the Word of God abides.

We may learn lessons from the grass. How often we have gone out just as the grass or the Indian corn was beginning to spring forth, and as we passed along we noticed a big clod of earth detached and rising up. It might weigh several pounds. And then we had the curiosity to look under it; and what did we see?—just a little blade of grass, perhaps a blade of wheat, so tiny and small it had no color to it yet;—just a little white mass of fiber and water; that is all, nothing to it. It was just standing upright, and not only standing upright under that clod of earth, but it was steadily pushing it out of the way, and was just keeping its place and going right along, regardless of this clod. It is safe to say that a blade of grass pushes away a weight ten thousand times its own weight. If a man had as much power according to his size and weight,

he could lift a mountain; he could take up Pike's Peak, and throw it off as a lad would a football.

But when you take it out of there, it will not hold itself up. It just yields—it is gone. If you even remove the clod, it cannot stand. That blade of grass is not such a little thing after all, but it is undeniable that there was a wonderful power manifested in that blade of grass. But what was that power?—God's own life, his own personal presence there, doing in the grass just what he designed for the grass; it was God that was working in it, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

Not only his power, but his wisdom. How often we have seen a tree sending its roots all off to one side, no roots on the other side at all. Why did it do that?—O, because there was a stream of water over here; but on the other side it was dry and barren. How did that tree know that there was water over there? Not only so, but if a root of the tree in going along on its wonted course to find water, finds an obstruction in the way that it cannot pierce, it will go down under and come up, and go on there. Is that chance? There is no chance about it.

Botanists tells us, and we know it, that each different kind of plant requires a different kind of food. There are little fibers sent out from the roots; these fibers are the mouths by which it takes up its nourishment. These fibers gather around a portion of earth. But those who have observed closely will tell us that these roots will discriminate and go out to find the soil they need for their nourishment. How do they know how to do this? That is what the birds and beasts do. They go where they can find the proper food for their nourishment. Man does the same thing. We have seen the power that was in that blade of grass, and it was the power of God, and that is Christ. But Christ is not only the power of God, but he is the wisdom of God; and so both the power and the wisdom of God are in that blade of grass. The plant acknowledges its helplessness. The plant never assumed to be something it was not made to be. The plant never got out of its place. If we pull it out of its place it is good for nothing. When it was in the place where God put it, it was all right. It is utterly subject to God, and therefore the power of God is manifest in it to bring it to the perfection as grass of the field, with the life

of God in it, and that same life of God in it gives it the power to get the water and the nourishment that it needs. When an animal does that thing, we call it instinct. What is it? It is the life which God gives. It is the measure of life which God gives for the beast according to his kind to direct it, and the beast in the perfect state of nature when connected with men, does those things which are necessary for his strength, and health; the wisdom which God has given, is for his perfection as a beast.

But when man does these things, it is not God any more, is it? No, it is because I am so wise, and I have such keen perception. No, no, it is the life of God. Whatever wisdom a man has, the strength he has, comes from Him. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this,"—that I am the Lord?—No; "that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am the Lord." In pursuance of this thought, that all flesh is as grass. We are all plants together, with one life in us all. Now we noticed that plant that was in the ground with a clod of earth upon it. It had no power in itself whatever to lift off that clod, but there was a mighty power in it, and it is so that if any man in proportion to the grass had proportionate power in him, he could lift the Alps. Our Saviour said, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed," ye could lift a mountain. Now was that guess work?—All that is faith, absolute dependence upon God. Instead of being frightened or discouraged or disgusted because we are only grass, that is our hope. What God can do with the grass of the field he can do with us if we will have the faith. God will do for us what he does for that.

What life therefore is manifested everywhere in the universe?—The life of Christ. Christ in the flesh crucified and risen, Christ in the flesh crucified in me, because if Christ is crucified some distance from me, even though it be close beside me, it is far away. I cannot make the connection. But when I know that that life which was offered, and which was powerful enough to gain the victory over sin and death, that very same life is in me, and confess it and believe it, everything that that life can do is mine. Take a verse that is familiar to us all: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I de-

light to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart." That is to say, thy law is my life, and that is exactly what is in the last verse of the twelfth chapter of John: "And I know that his commandment [that is in man] is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." And this is life eternal, that we might know the only true God, and the Son whom he has sent. To know him and Christ is eternal life; therefore the law of God is simply life. It is the law of life—the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus—which has made us free from the law of sin and death. So the law of God is simply the life of God; it is his life. Then there cannot be anything arbitrary about it. People think of the laws of God as something that he made as an earthly ruler would make laws; that is, God made man, and then he thought, Now, what law would I better make for his guidance that is good for man? But God did not do that way. The law was his life. He put the life into the man as his law, and so long as that man would consent to be absolutely controlled by him, he would be a holy man, a godly man.

We speak of the laws of nature and the laws of God; or, of the natural law, and the moral law. What is the difference between them? Natural law, that is, we see a plant, and it grows in a certain way, and it always grows in the right way; it will grow in the way that God has made it. It lets God live his own life in it. Then what are called natural laws are simply the life of God manifested in the things we see,—the being that is perfect after its kind. It is the same life in the grass, in the vine, in the oak tree. But God made the grass after its kind, and the vine to be another thing after its kind, and the oak tree to be another thing after its kind; and the same life in all brings each to perfection after its kind. And he made man after his kind—to be grass, it is true, dust, but to have the supreme position on earth. And the life of God in the man, if you will yield to it as implicitly as the grass and the trees, will bring him to perfection after his kind, to the perfection that God has designed for him.

Now what would be the case if this grass should begin to assume that it would be an oak tree; it will not be grass, but it will grow into an oak tree, and claim to be something it is not?—Then God's plan is not perfected in it. It resists God's life. It says, I don't want to be this way; I want to be that way, and I will make myself that. And

the whole thing is frustrated. So we see that the law is one, and that it is God's life, and it is not an arbitrary arrangement, but God is the author and source of life, and his life works in all his creatures so far as they let him. But now we see not all things put under him. We see a curse; and why?—Because the curse came upon the earth. But first the curse came upon man, and then upon the earth because of man's sin. What was the curse that fell upon man?—Death.

Because of sin, came the curse and death. Death in the absence of life. So death fell upon man because he rejected the life of God. He said, I will be God; I will not be dependent upon him; I will take this thing, this fruit—and you know that was the only thing he could see in the garden. He thought God had deprived him of everything because this one thing was kept back. He thought that all the other was nothing; he thought he must have that in order to live. So he said I will take of this one tree, which will put me in my right, and give me my power, so that I can be independent of God, and I will cast him off. What did he get?—He got the absence of life. God in his mercy did not take man at his word, and let him be utterly separated from him, because, if he had, he would have continued in death. But he continues his life to man in his weak and fallen state. But now he is fallen. We do not see the perfection of life. We see the curse upon the earth, because of man's sin.

Thorns and thistles are simply evidence of weakness, of the diminution of the life-power. The weakness of man, as well as of beasts, is evidence of the reduction of the life-power, that is the absence of Christ. Christ has taken all our weakness upon himself, so that when we accept him and know him, and have a knowledge of him, then we are made new creatures: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Instead of bringing forth thorns and thistles and briars to be rejected, he brings forth fruit unto everlasting life, to the glory of God.

"Build a little fence of trust around to-day;
Fill it in with living deeds and therein stay.
Lock not through the sheltering bars upon to-morrow;
God will help thee bear what comes of joy or sorrow."

God is Love.*

G. E. FIFIELD.

(Wednesday Evening, Feb. 17, 1897)

ELDER FIFIELD spoke from the text, Jer. 17: 5-8. The idea many have of Christianity is this: God wants us to deny ourselves of everything here and be miserable in this world, for the sake of being happy by and by. But Satan, on the contrary, wants us to have a good time here, but is not thinking of the future. Never was there a greater libel on my Father. God is the best friend of the human race. He seeks to give us the greatest possible amount of happiness now and evermore, ever wishing to lift us into greater possibilities of joy; while Satan is the greatest enemy of mankind, never lifting the crystal goblet of bliss to the human lips, without dashing it to the ground as soon as a single drop has been tasted. Satan lied about God in the beginning, saying he was arbitrary and unjust and unkind; and all mankind, it would seem, have believed that lie. So far is this from the truth that the inspired Word tells us, "God is love." He is not love and justice, for justice is only an attribute of love. How can he who loves all men with an immortal love be unjust to any? Mercy and grace are only manifestations of love. Even the omniscience of God is the result of his love; because he is all-loving, he can be all-knowing. Hatred cannot know love.

Once infinite Love walked the earth in human form, and they crucified him, because they knew him not. But love seeth and comprehendeth all things. The power of God to make men righteous, is simply the power of his love to win men to love, which flows out in the acts of love. Even the wrath of God spoken of throughout the Bible, is his wrath not against the sinner, but against the sin. He hates the sin, because it is the enemy of the sinner whom he loves. The measure of his love for the sinner is the measure of his wrath against the sin. That wrath will never cease until sin shall be no more. His desire is, however, to save the sinner from his sin, so that he may not perish with it. When he does thus perish, the Lord says, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways."

* Abstract of discourse preached at Y. M. C. A. Hall, Lincoln, Neb.