

the latter there are *seven* Blessings; in the former *seven* Woes. An *eighth* Woe is pronounced but it is a summary of the seven.

V. 13.—Two ways by which the Scribes and Pharisees shut up the kingdom of Heaven, 1, By their wicked example; 2, By active opposition to the cause of Christ.—What made their case so bad was that they were *leaders*—that others looked up to them.

V. 14.—They *devour* widows' houses—get possession of the property of widows unjustly and under pretence of piety! Note how this is done by the Church of Rome by terrors of Purgatory. Greedy men are cruel as death.

V. 15.—They had fanatical zeal, and were anxious to promote their own sect.—*Twofold*—The pervert is generally far worse than the original errorist. Mark the zeal of perverts to Popery. The farther error goes the worse it gets.

V. 16.—To swear "by the temple" was very common among the Jews. "*Gold*," either the ornaments of the temple or the treasure in it.

V. 18.—"*Guilty*"—is a debtor, his oath is binding.

V. 23.—*Tithe*. See Lev. xxvii. 30. The weightier matters of the Law are named by our Lord,—1. Judgment, or a due regard to righteousness; 2. Mercy, to which the Pharisees were utter strangers; 3. Faith, which here means *fidelity*.

V. 24.—"*Strain at*"—should be strain out. It is generally admitted that *at* was a printer's mistake. The Jews used to strain their wine before drinking, lest possibly they might swallow a gnat and thus be "defiled," the gnat being an unclean animal! *Swallowing camels* is a proverbial expression for gross and enormous greediness in sin.

V. 25.—*Cup and platter*: dishes for wine and meat. The food has been secured by *extortion* (robbery) and *excess* (incontinence). All the pleasures of a sinful life are here included.

V. 27.—*Whited Sepulchres*: The Jews whitened the graves in the spring of every year.

V. 31.—They held in honor the traditions and principles of the fathers; they walked in their footsteps, and hence they incur the same kind of guilt only in deeper and darker degree. The Roman Catholic who holds to the traditions of his church is thus responsible in his measure for the horrors of the Inquisition; and so with any church which does not repudiate persecuting principles.

V. 33.—*Generation*—brood. *Damnation of Hell*—the sentence, or judgment that condemns to hell.

LESSONS.

1. We must take care not to keep others

out of Heaven by bad example or by carelessness or wrong teaching. Sabbath School teachers have a most solemn responsibility in this respect.

2. Robbery, fraud, and all dishonesty are worthy of damnation; but to commit these sins under the guise of religion deserves "the greater damnation." V. 14.

3. God has special care over the widow and the fatherless. V. 14.

4. There may be intense sectarian zeal without a spark of true religion. V. 15.

5. It is a sin to swear lightly by any creature. To swear "by Heaven," is to appeal to the Lord who reigns in Heaven. An oath is a solemn act of worship. Profane swearing is low and vulgar as well as sinful.

6. We may strain out gnats, but we must be careful not to swallow camels; we should observe the minutest points of morality and duty, but we must be all the more mindful of "judgment, mercy and faith."

7. God cares for our inward condition—not for our outward state, vv. 26–28.

8. Every generation must be better or worse than the preceding one. There is no standing still.

9. All the woes here pronounced by Christ are incurred by every one who is a hypocrite and anxious to *appear* to be what in fact he is not.

DOCTRINE.

God hates hypocrisy. Job xx. 5; Isaiah xxxiii. 14; Luke xviii. 11.

SECOND SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—The Ten Virgins. Matthew xxv. 1–13.

This lesson relates to the second coming of Christ. *The Ten Virgins*—professing christians generally. *Bridegroom*—Christ. *Bride*—the perfected church. *Lamps*—the outward christian profession. *The Oil* is the Holy Spirit in the heart. *The Sellers* are the means of grace.

In Eastern countries marriage is frequently if not generally performed at night. The Bridegroom and his friends go in procession to the house of the Bride's father where the wedding takes place; they then return together to the Bridegroom's house where a feast is kept up often for several days. Torches and lamps were used in processions to and from the Bride's house.

Vv. 3, 4.—*Vessels*—small vessels separate from the lamps, in which oil was kept to replenish the lamps.

V. 5.—*Slumbered and slept*—nodded and fell asleep. This expression indicates "two stages of spiritual declension"—1. That half voluntary lethargy or drowsiness, which is apt to steal over one who falls into inactivity; 2. A conscious yielding to it after a little vain resistance."